

CHRISTMAS AROUND
THE WORLD 10

READER

WHEN CHRISTMAS MUSIC PASSES BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION

As Pepper Mill Rondo, Max
Allison and Doug Kaplan
find the horrifying and the
sublime in holiday kitsch.

By NOAH BERLATSKY 25



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THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



We three queens

Sondra Radvanovsky sings the last acts of Donizetti's three Tudor queen operas.

The 2019 Reader Gift Guide

More than 90 local items handpicked by Reader staff, including records, books, classes, handcrafted clothing, and home goods



Your guide to legal weed

Smoke 'em if you got 'em (and starting January 1, every one can get 'em). Read our marijuana issue, on stands December 26.





Read/Write Library Chicago DANIELLE A. SCRUGGS FOR CHICAGO READER

HOUSING FORWARD/PADS EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM

Needs help to set up and break down temporary sheltering at area churches and prepare meals for guests; go to housingforward.org/get-involved for details.

At churches across the suburbs, including Oak Park, River Forest, Forest Park, and Berwyn
708-338-1724, ext. 220 or 202, or etmartin@housingforward.org

RAINBOW HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE

Needs hospice patient support/companions (including bilingual people who speak Spanish or Polish) to keep a loving presence for hospice patients for a few hours while

their family members run errands or take a short break. Go to rainbowhospice.org/life-institute/volunteers/ to sign up and get more information.
7435 W. Talcott (and other area locations)
847-685-9900

OPEN HEART MAGIC

Volunteers are trained as "Certified Hospital Magicians" and scheduled on Saturdays to visit children in area hospitals and entertain them bedside. Go to openheartmagic.org/get-involved/ for more information.

At various area hospitals, including La Rabida Children's Hospital, 6501 S. Promontory, and Rush University Children's Hospital, 1653 W. Congress
312-624-8079

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY 800-227-2345

The American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery program provides volunteer drivers to cancer patients who need help getting to treatment and other appointments. Driver's license and car required. Go to cancer.org/involved/volunteer/road-to-recovery.html to learn more.

FAMOUS FIDO RESCUE & ADOPTION ALLIANCE

Animal-loving volunteers at this local rescue can work as dog or cat cuddlers and socialize with animals needing human companionship. Go to famousfidorescue.org/ to learn more.
3124 W. Irving Park
773-907-0305

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Holiday helpers

Volunteer opportunities across the Chicago area this Christmas season

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Building community is the reason for the holiday season! There's no better way to show your fellow citizens that you appreciate them and love this city than by offering your skills and time as a volunteer. There are a plethora of organizations in Chicagoland that need more hands to help get their important work done, and we've listed a few of them here. If you'd like to find more organizations, or different kinds of volunteer opportunities, a good resource is the Volunteer Match website at volunteermatch.org, where you can search by location, topic, time requirements, and more. Keep in mind that all of these organizations will gladly receive a gift of money from you, so get in touch with them if you can give dollars but are short on time.

READ/WRITE LIBRARY CHICAGO

Needs drop-in help for shelving, cataloging, and staffing (opening the doors and greeting visitors); visit readwritelibrary.org/get-involved/volunteer for details.
914 N. California (entrance on Walton)
773-336-2516 or info@readwritelibrary.org

THE WASTESHED CREATIVE REUSE CENTER

Needs help sorting and pricing creative reuse materials and coordinating events; see

thewasteshed.com/volunteer for details.

2842 W. Chicago
773-666-5997 or info@thewasteshed.com

CREATIVE CHICAGO REUSE EXCHANGE

Needs help sorting and arranging items in the warehouse space; check out creativechirx.org/volunteer for details.
2124 W. 82nd Pl. (at the Envision Unlimited Frick Center)
info@creativechirx.org

MY BLOCK MY HOOD MY CITY

Needs: ongoing volunteer help throughout the year, including shoveling sidewalks for seniors, mowing lawns, and more. MBMHMC is hosting holiday decoration events in public thoroughfares in several neighborhoods this December; go to formyblock.org/events for scheduling and to sign up. Various locations in Chicago
volunteer@mbmhmc.com or fill out this form: <https://www.formyblock.org/m3volunteer-signup>

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DEVON AVENUE

Susan Patel is home

Her family owns the largest Indian grocery store chain in America. So why has she never felt like she fit the traditional mold of a “Brown kid”?

By RIMA PARIKH

Susan Patel greets me like she’s my cool aunt. She’s warm and friendly and very blunt. She’s one of the Patels, the family that owns Patel Brothers, the largest Indian grocery store chain in America, and she has opinions.

“I always tell my family, why are you buying more Patel Brothers? It dies with these baby boomers,” she tells me. “I’m like, these younger generations are just gonna not go to Patel Brothers anymore. They’re just going to buy it online. Or they’re going to go to your ready-made section. They’re not buying the grains or anything anymore. They don’t cook.” This feels like a personal attack, like she’s family, like in addition to defending my generation I need to explain the viability of my chosen career and how I’m “too busy” for a husband right now.

The 44-year-old wears a wedding ring on one hand, a turquoise gem on the other. Dressed in a leaf-print tunic, jeans, and flats, she’s bubbly and gestures wildly as she speaks. If you didn’t know her, you might not know that she’s perpetually overcommitted and overbooked, because she’s so engaged in our conversation, and not the type of busy person that makes you feel bad about how less-busy you are. A self-described wiseass, Patel owned the now-shuttered Patel Handicrafts, a store that sold Vinod pressure cookers and silverware sets and tongue cleaners and Hindu artifacts. She lives nearby with her husband Neal, nine-year-old daughter Laila, and, much to the chagrin of every Indian aunty with an opinion—which is to say, all of them—a dog.

Today there are 57 Patel Brothers locations across the country, and the entire Patel enterprise—which also includes a travel agency, a clothing store, and a cafe—is worth \$140 million, according to Food52. Pushing around a cart at the Patel Brothers on Devon is brave. It takes significant maneuvering around families who shop in packs, middle-aged men who grab cardboard cases of mangoes (the peels end up on seats of the 49B bus, a true marker that summer has arrived), and stray kids who play tag in the aisles. If it’s a Saturday, prepare to get your ankles whacked by a cart wheeled by an aunty making a beeline for the fresh karela. It’s not personal—her parking meter is just

running low. And even after all these years, you can still find the founders of Patel Brothers and the architects of Devon, Mafat and Tulsi Patel, circling around the store, stocking shelves and inspecting merchandise.

Susan Patel has always had a place for herself on Devon. Still, she wants to prove that she’s more than her last name. “I don’t think anyone should hold a space as our token brownie, token Guju, token Muslim woman, token Hindu. I just feel like some people want to say, ‘I’m it,’” she says. “I never came on Devon and assumed a role, like this is who I am. You have to earn your keep. Devon does not like outsiders.”

When I tell my mom I’m writing about Susan Patel, I say that she’s the daughter of Tulsi Patel. “Oh, Tulsi Bhai?” my mom says, as if it’s common knowledge that she knows him. “I didn’t realize he had a daughter!” I ask her how she knows him. “Beta, we’ve been here for 30 years,” she tells me, not masking that she’s dumbfounded. “In 30 years, of course we’d get to know him. We’ve all been here for so long. Beta, *you* know him.”

Like Patel, I grew up in a Gujarati family in Skokie, though a generation later. (I’m in my 20s.) Two years ago at the Patel Brothers on Devon, I had wandered away from my mom



ADITI DAMLE

and studied the fried chickpea mixes filling a double row of massive metal barrels in the fresh snack aisle. An older man with kind eyes and a gentle voice, and wearing a gray vest, asked me if I was lost. It was Tulsi Patel, who my mom says would chide my father about buying chewing tobacco or pan masala because he knew it could destroy your teeth. “Even though it would help his business, he told Milit not to buy it,” she remembers. “That’s the kind of person he is.”

Devon’s South Asian enclave may never have blossomed if in 1968 Mafat Patel hadn’t emigrated from the western state of Gujarat to get his MBA at Indiana University. He was part of the first wave of Indian immigrants that entered through the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which created immigration routes through skilled labor and family reunification. After moving to Chicago in the early 70s Mafat was frustrated by the void in Indian cuisine. He enlisted the help of his brother Tulsi and Tulsi’s wife Aruna, who then came to America; his wife, Chanchal, also joined later. Together, they launched the first Patel Brothers grocery store in 1974, a rickety storefront

on Devon, in the middle of a mostly Orthodox Jewish neighborhood. Today, it’s a place where you can find the vegetables and spices for an elaborate curry, Britannia biscuits and Haldiram’s snacks, kulfi ice cream, and Thums Up soda. It’s Trader Joe’s for Brown people.

Susan Patel played volleyball and soccer at Niles West High School. Her parents didn’t mind that she didn’t want to be on Devon much when she was in high school. Sometimes she’d drive up to the curb after practice and wait while a Patel Brothers employee handed her a bag of groceries because her parents didn’t think a sports bra and shorts were appropriate attire for a modest teenager. She spent time with her predominantly white high school friends. “I just didn’t hang around Indians,” she says. “Not that I had anything against Indians, I just didn’t trust the intentions.”

To her, the Indian community felt oppressively tight-knit. If someone saw Patel at a party or out late at night, they’d snitch on her to her dad at the store. People would tell her parents if she was seen talking to a guy. Or spending time with guys and girls, even if they

were just sitting in a parking lot. Her voice jumps an octave when I ask how often this happened. “All the time. All the time. I finally had to be like, *Yeah I’m at a party. What do you want me to be, a nun?*” I’m like, I’m going out with my friends. I’m not doing anything wrong.” Her parents dragged her to Bollywood concerts and then made her sit on a couch backstage so they didn’t waste a ticket on her. This was one of the perks, and unusual punishments, of being a Patel.

She felt like she didn’t have anything in common with most Indians her age, other than being Indian. “I was always deemed as like whitewashed or Oreo”—meaning just like the cookie she was brown on the outside and white on the inside—“just because I didn’t give into the Indian thing,” she says. “They were like, ‘because we’re Indian, we have to get along.’ We have to have things in common other than what we look like.”

Patel went to Northeastern Illinois University to study teaching for a year before transferring to Long Island University, Southampton. She studied abroad in India for two semesters. In those days, not many people outside of her

family even knew what Patel looked like. She was the “mystery child” of Tulsi Bhai. “I always knew I would come back,” she says.

Eight years later, she did just that and settled into teaching math and science at a Chicago charter school and met her future husband, who lived in the same building. (“Funny, I never thought I was going to marry an Indian. Who knew?”) After only a year of teaching, and as she grappled with whether she had made the correct career choice, she says, life happened. Her marriage was postponed when her aunt died, and she got a job as a hostess at her family’s restaurant on Devon. But the hours were grueling, and she wanted to have a life where she could spend time with her family. She soon got a job as an assistant director at the Indo-American Center (IAC) on Devon, a nonprofit that serves the South Asian immigrant community.

In late 2007, Patel took out a loan and purchased Patel Handicrafts from the Patel Brothers company in 2008, and it became her baby. Despite owning a store stocked with statues of gods like Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (the goddess of knowledge) that ➔

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she carefully selected on visits to India, Patel didn't know much about Hindu mythology. (In her defense, there are a lot of gods; I wouldn't be able to answer a *Jeopardy!* question about most of them.) When she worked at the store, senior citizens would stop by and ask her to translate documents, and school field trips would come with questions. Patel brings her hands to her hips. In a deep voice, her best schoolteacher impression, she says, "And now we're here from this elementary school, can you tell us a little bit about Ram and Krishna?" and I'm like, 'What? I don't know the story.' Oh my god, I'm like, Googling to figure it out." She eventually learned from studying Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gita.

“We are told to *do*, not to think,” Patel says. It's an old way of saying that being an Indian immigrant, especially a Gujarati, means you're expected to be practical. There's one way to load a dishwasher. There's one way to scoop rice out of a pan (start from the side, not the middle). Water should never linger around the edges of the sink. Gujarati food is simple and cheap and for the masses. *Dal* (lentils), *bhat* (rice), *shaak* (veggies). The Patel Brothers motto, she says, is “Keep it cheap and fast.”

Patel admits she does like the simple things. Her brother Michael, she tells me, has three sports cars and six gym memberships, and while she could theoretically get free groceries for life, she chooses not to. Recently she checked into the Spirit Airlines terminal on Facebook, arguably the truest mark of a Guju. But like many second-generation kids, Patel knows she doesn't fit the traditional mold of a “Brown kid.” Patel wants my generation of Gujaratis and South Asian Americans to not be constrained by tradition, but instead think about what they do.

While my family didn't own the biggest Indian grocery chain in America, I understand what she's saying. In my family, *doing* means talking. I don't know if having the social energy of an entire Red Bull street team is Gujarati-specific, but sometimes when my family gets together from around the country it seems like it. “We're a hyper-ass people,” says my best friend, whose last name is also Patel. “Gujaratis have zero chill.”

This is especially true for aunties. There's always an auntie to comment on your life: Loud Auntie, Gossip Auntie, Warm Auntie, Wine Auntie (who will have exactly one glass of wine), Packing-You-Snacks-In-A-Ziploc-Before-You-Go-Clubbing Auntie, Tactless-But-Wants-The-

Best-For-You Auntie.

This is where, like Patel, I don't fit in with what's expected: I am Quiet Auntie. I am happy sitting on a couch, wrapped in a blanket, wordless, like a devastatingly beautiful young woman in a Bollywood film who has just learned a terrible, terrible secret. Sure, I am absolutely capable of mingling with guests, holding four babies, and sending the family WhatsApp group an encouraging “Interesting!” to some video of pseudoscience health advice about how grapes can fix your bad personality. But my favorite part of family functions is locking myself in the bathroom,

**“I was always
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Indian thing.”**

—Susan Patel

hoisting my phone two inches from my face, and Googling the details of that lady getting sucked out of that Southwest flight window. Now that I'm older and a young auntie myself, I understand that being quiet doesn't make me less Gujarati or less a part of my family. I want to be the kind of auntie that makes things easier for the next quiet kid in my family. I hope that even with some Gujarati-isms ingrained in them, the next generation can arbitrate their identities on their own terms.

In October, a long-awaited Patel Brothers opened in Niles. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, as well as my mom in three phone calls, the grand opening attracted hordes of shoppers, some of whom waited for hours in the rain. “There was so much pushing,” my mom said. “But they had free samosas.” I asked if she'd still go to the Devon location once in a while, if only for the sake of nostalgia. I can hear her shaking her head through the phone with the same vigor as the one ➔



EXPLORE ANDERSONVILLE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

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alleycatcomics.com

Chicago Dance Supply
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773 728 5344
chicagodancesupply.com

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transistorchicago.com

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jerryssandwiches.com

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ranallispiatz.com

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773 334 7168
vincentchicago.com

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guslegacy.org

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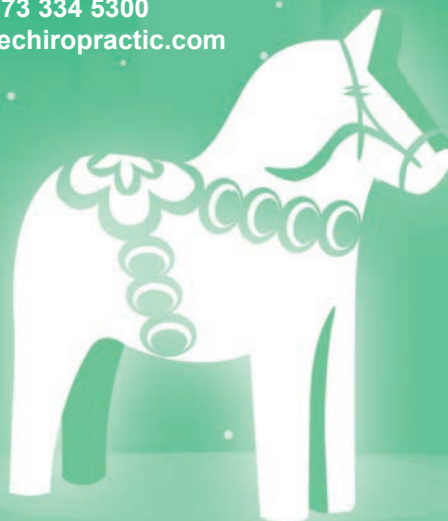
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healveterinary.com

The Writers Workspace
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writersworkspace.com

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time she watched MTV2: “Nooo. No, no, no.”

Patel Brothers is buying out strip malls in the suburbs, which means South Asian suburbanites don’t have a reason to drive to the old neighborhood. Now they can grab Patel Brothers groceries, go to a Patel Brothers travel agent, get Patel Brothers fast food, and stop by a Patel Brothers jewelry store, all without leaving Naperville.

Devon hasn’t suffered the massive gentrification of other ethnic neighborhoods like Logan Square and Pilsen, yet the neighborhood has changed. Dulhan’s, a clothing and jewelry store, is closing after 30 years. A large sign in the window shouts: “It has been an absolute joy and blessing to serve every one of you | Love * Gratitude Yogi * Raj (owners Dulhan’s).” The shopkeeper affixes a cardboard “STORE CLOSE OUT!” poster atop a shiny gray Mercedes parked outside. Red and green balloons bounce off of tinsel-covered lamp posts, dancing to funk-inspired music blasting through the front door. Across the street, Andaaz Jewelers sits vacant since the business moved to the suburbs. While chains like Joyalukkas and Malabar have built mar-

ble storefronts in the past year, they hover over mom-and-pop shops like Vitha and NP Jewelers.

One street over at Punjabi Dhaba, the lunch rush is slow and the restaurant’s owner, an old man in a billowing white kurta, stands on a ladder and fiddles with the sign. A customer walks up to the entrance and waits a few seconds before he says, “Excuse me.” The owner pauses, then scrambles down. “Oh! You want to eat here?”

Even if Patel Brothers is driving business away from Devon, Susan Patel is still pushing for a revitalization of the neighborhood. She sits on the Indo-American Democratic Organization’s board and has been working with the West Ridge Chamber of Commerce to increase collaboration between Devon shopkeepers and encourage civic engagement. She worries about the lack of South Asian solidarity, especially along class lines. If Brown people can raise money, erect beautiful temples, and have representation in government, she asks, why can’t we be farther along?

“The rich don’t want to help the poor,” she says. “Trump has been good for a lot of South Asians in letting them stay exactly where they

want to be.” She sees the unity in other culturally diverse communities and sees what’s missing in her own. “We’re so fragmented as is,” she says. “So how do we get this group of people together on the same page? What’s going to be that one thing that’s going to bring us all together?”

When I ask Patel what she wants for Devon and the next generation of South Asians, she spins out idea after idea. She sold the Patel Handicrafts retail space back to her family and is selling the remaining merchandise as a wholesaler. She’s working on a home and lifestyle brand catering to South Asian millennials called Bhandu Ethnics, named after her family’s village in Gujarat. Her dream is to launch a cultural academy where kids can learn of Hindu mythology and holidays. She wants younger South Asians to have a reason to come to Devon.

Then she flips the question. “What do you want?”

To me it’s remarkable that Devon has lasted as long as it has. Without Devon, we may never have gotten to know Maggi noodles and Rooh Afza, or mehndi cones and the Dabur Amla hair oil that smells just like your grandma.

Reena’s ice cream from Patel Brothers was the closest thing I had to a key chain with my name on it. Devon was a refuge for generations of Desis. It gave kids like me a window into their immigrant parents’ home country and expanded our own idea of home.

I tell Patel that even if Devon loses its identity as a South Asian enclave, it might gain another identity as another cultural hub for a new immigrant population. For now, I can count on familiar sights: the restaurant Tiffin serving enough white people for other white people to not feel intimidated, and enough Indian people for other Indian people to trust it; the older woman, head wrapped in a cerulean hijab, sitting on a milk crate outside Patel Brothers holding a bouquet of balloons; the extensive frozen meal section inside Patel Brothers that caters to the needs of millennial microwave chefs; the fresh sugarcane juice, especially in the summer.

“I want to go to people in your generation, and be like, ‘OK, what are the ten things you need in your home?’” Patel says. “I don’t want to sell another spoon ever again.” ■

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RESTAURANT ROUNDUP

Christmas around the world

Spend the holiday on a culinary trip around the globe without leaving Chicago.

By **READER STAFF**

Al Bawadi Grill — *Middle Eastern*

Must-have dish: Makdous, aka oil-cured baby eggplants stuffed with crushed walnuts, red pepper, and garlic. 10 AM-11 PM. [7216 W. 87th, Bridgeview, 708-599-1999, albawadigrill.com](https://www.7216W87th.com), estimated cost per person \$25

Andies Restaurant — *Mediterranean*

Must-have dish: Grand buffet, which includes traditional holiday dishes and desserts. 11 AM-8 PM. [5253 N. Clark, 773-784-8616, andieschicago.com](https://www.5253NClark.com), buffet \$27.95 per person, a la carte menu also available

Ba Le Sandwich Shop

— *Vietnamese*

Must-have dish: House-special banh mi with paté, ham, headcheese, and pork roll. 7:30 AM-6 PM (may close earlier if it's slow). [5014 N. Broadway, 773-561-4424, bale-sandwich.com](https://www.5014NBroadway.com), estimated cost per person \$10 or less

Chengdu Impression — *Chinese*

Must-have dishes: Cumin lamb, smoked tea duck. 4-10 PM. [2545 N. Halsted, 773-477-6256, chengduimpression.com](https://www.2545NHalsted.com), estimated cost per person \$25-\$30

City Mouse — *American*

Must-have dishes: Pork cheek, steak frites. 7 AM-10 PM. [311 N. Morgan, 312-764-1968, city-mousechicago.com](https://www.311NMorgan.com), estimated cost per person \$60

Daley's Restaurant — *American, Soul food*

Must-have dishes: Liver and onions or a classic breakfast. 7 AM-3 PM. [6257 S. Cottage Grove, 773-643-6670, daleysrestaurant.com](https://www.6257SCottageGrove.com), estimated cost per person \$15

Diner Grill — *American*

Must-have dishes: Gypsy, Mexican, or hobo skillet with hash browns and toast. Open 24 hours. [1635 W. Irving Park, 773-248-2030, orderdinergrill.com](https://www.1635WIrvingPark.com), estimated cost per person \$15

Dolo — *Chinese*

Must-have dish: Lobster. 9 AM-midnight. [2222 S. Archer, 312-877-5117, dolorestaurant.com](https://www.2222SArcher.com), estimated cost per person \$24



Search the Reader's online database of thousands of Chicago-area restaurants at chicagoreader.com/food.

FOOD & DRINK

Eleven City Diner

— *Old-school diner and delicatessen*

Must-have dishes: Latke plate, milkshakes. 9 AM-3 PM. [1112 S. Wabash](http://1112.S.Wabash), 312-212-1112, eleven-citydiner.com, estimated cost per person \$30

Evergreen Restaurant

— *Chinese*

Must-have dish: Oysters with black bean sauce. 11 AM-10:30 PM. [2411 S. Wentworth](http://2411.S.Wentworth), 312-225-8898, orderevergreenrestaurant.com, estimated cost per person \$24

Grand Palace — Chinese

Must-have dish: Five Taste Duck. 11 AM-9 PM. [225 W. 26th](http://225.W.26th), 312-225-3888, estimated cost per person \$22

Lawry's the Prime Rib

— *Steak house*

Must-have dishes: Prime rib carved tableside, Yorkshire pudding. Call to confirm Christmas Day hours. [100 E. Ontario](http://100.E.Ontario), 312-787-5000, lawrysonline.com/lawrys-the-prime-rib-chicago, estimated cost per person \$50

Longman & Eagle

— *Special Chinese Christmas dinner*

Must-have dishes: Family style preorder meals. 5 PM to 10 PM (or until the food runs out). [2657 N. Kedzie](http://2657.N.Kedzie), 773-276-7110, longmanandeagle.com, estimated cost per person \$15 and up

Pearl's Place Restaurant

— *Southern comfort food*

Must-have dish: Smothered pork chops and biscuits. 8 AM-4 PM (by reservation only). [3901 S. Michigan](http://3901.S.Michigan), 877) 275-5852, pearlsplacer-restaurant.com, estimated cost per person \$25

Sabri Nihari — Pakistani

Must-have dishes: Palak paneer (vegetarian), sabri nihari (carnivorous). 12 PM-11 PM. [2502 W. Devon](http://2502.W.Devon), 773-465-3272, sabrinihari.com, estimated cost per person \$30

Sun Wah BBQ — Chinese

Must-have dish: Peking duck. Call to confirm Christmas Day hours. [5041 N. Broadway](http://5041.N.Broadway), 773-769-1254, sunwahbbq.com, estimated cost per person \$8 and up

Tesfa Ethiopian Cuisine

— *Ethiopian*

Must-have dish: Key sir alicha (red beets). 9:30 AM-10 PM. [1023 W. Wilson](http://1023.W.Wilson), 312-698-4481, tesfacuisine.com, estimated cost per person \$15

The Hopleaf

— *Bar specializing in Belgian beers*

Must-haves: In the winter, the bar's tap list often includes two inimitable Belgian classics, St. Bernardus Abt 12 and Brasserie Lefebvre Barbär. 6 PM-2 AM, kitchen closed. [5148 N. Clark](http://5148.N.Clark), 773-334-9851, hopleafbar.com, estimated cost per person \$12

Uru Swati — Indian

Must-have dish: Ras puri with undhiyu, which is yams, potatoes, and mixed vegetables served with mango pulp and puffy fry bread. 11:30 AM-9:30 PM (may close earlier if it's slow). [2629 W. Devon](http://2629.W.Devon), 773-262-5280, uruswati-chicago.com, estimated cost per person \$20

Weber Grill Restaurant

— *American, BBQ, steak house*

Must-have dish: Tomahawk ribeye for two. 11 AM-9 PM. [539 N. State](http://539.N.State), 312-467-9696, webergrillrestaurant.com, estimated cost per person \$50

Yassa African Restaurant

— *Sengalese, Pan-African*

Must-have dish: Yassa lamb. 11 AM-10 PM. [3511 S. King Drive](http://3511.S.KingDrive), 773-488-5599, yassarestaurant.com, estimated cost per person \$20

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Work in Progress
JEAN WHITESIDE/SHOWTIME

SMALL SCREEN

Six degrees of Abby McEnany

How a network of local creatives brought a queer, authentically Chicago story to Showtime.

By **MARISSA OBERLANDER**

A chance meeting at the corner of Clark and Winnemac. A one-woman show at iO Theater. A viral short film filled with local improvisers. In an alchemic combination, these quintessential Chicago events catapulted prolific Chicago comedian Abby McEnany into the national spotlight.

McEnany, a 51-year-old Chicago improviser, makes her television debut this week on Showtime's *Work in Progress*, a half-hour, single-cam comedy cocreated by McEnany and Second City alum Tim Mason, and cowritten by Lilly Wachowski (*The Matrix*, *Sense8*). Her path to success is not a story of a meteoric rise in the second half of a long career in comedy—"career" being a strong word, in McEnany's opinion. Her path to this premiere is a story of Chicago, its small-town connections, and a growing movement to give our city and its artists a second look.

I reviewed McEnany's autobiographical storytelling show of the same title at iO in 2016 and was charmed by the "voyeuristic trip" into

the self-labeled queer dyke's "mile-a-minute brain." Mason, a film director and longtime friend of McEnany, saw the same iO show and suggested a film adaptation over coffee at the Andersonville Starbucks. An attempt at a webseries morphed into a pilot filmed on a shoestring budget and in-kind donations from the improv community, which gained Showtime's attention at this year's Sundance Film Festival. After meeting McEnany several years ago outside Andersonville Hardware Store, Wachowski kept her eye on the project as well. She, coincidentally, is managed by the same team as Mason, who was signed in 2017 after the success of his short film *No Other Way to Say It*, and these bubbles of connection and conversation resulted in Wachowski and Circle of Confusion signing on as executive producers. "It's just a very strange, long story about kismet and shit coming together," McEnany says.

Adapting her stage material for television took some reimagining, but a narrative quickly centered on Abby's transformative relation-

ship with a transgender man, something McEnany had personally experienced but didn't talk about in her stage show. It took Wachowski to remind her that these stories were more than just her life; putting them on television is a big deal.

"To have a love story with trans characters . . . the fact that this fat, gray-haired woman who is a queer dyke as the lead of a fucking Showtime show, that is revolutionary," McEnany says. The weight of their endeavor carried through the casting in a concerted effort to populate the characters of the whole show with queers, from baristas to Lyft drivers to bartenders. In a broad casting call to queer, nonbinary, and transgender Chicagoans—no performance experience necessary—McEnany, Wachowski, and their casting director held personal interviews, adjusting character pronouns as needed.

For Mason, who identifies as straight, white, and cisgender, and directed every episode of season one, it was not only a learning process but an education in privilege. "From the way our language is oriented to how our bathrooms are oriented, how much the world is designed for people like me and so many things that I take for granted," Mason says. "The education is to try to be understanding of how many struggles are happening that I don't even see and help bring them to light."

McEnany says the unexpected benefit of pulling material from her life was that "for once I actually felt like an expert," in relation to her role as the writers' room muse. Her ability to be vulnerable at such high stakes is a credit to years of processing both in therapy and in her one-woman shows, as well as the writers' room's healthy respect for her clear personal boundaries. And it's also a character, McEnany reminds herself, finding safety in the fictionalization.

A mix of McEnany's storytelling and Mason's introspective gaze, *Work in Progress*'s tone is wacky and morbid, clever and cuttngly real. "As a depressed person, comedy has saved my life," McEnany says. "I worry that might sound dramatic, but it's true." Costar and local actor Karin Anglin, who plays Abby's sister, Alison, says these "lovely, self-deprecating elbow-in-the-gut" lines drew her to the project. (In another Chicago connection, Anglin and Mason knew each other from play-

ing husband and wife on a long-running Giant Eagle supermarket voice-over campaign.)

Among subplots addressing mental illness, suicidal ideation, and sizeism head-on, moments of hilarity emerge, from a therapist dying midsession to a bitchy coworker buying Abby a large, plot-critical tub of almonds. Her relationship with transgender man Chris (*The Politician*'s Theo Germaine) takes her own self-examination to a deeper level, opening Abby's eyes to today's "queer wonderland," nothing like her "very white and cis coming-out experience." Chris thrives on new ex-

WORK IN PROGRESS
Sundays at 10 PM on Showtime

periences and confrontation, in one instance bringing Abby face-to-face with her nemesis, *Saturday Night Live* alum Julia Sweeney, whose character "Pat" caused her nothing but emotional pain. In another, Abby faces her puritanical sexual views at a sex-positive party.

"I have to be very aware of my privilege," McEnany says, as a white, cis, queer person in an urban community. The pilot lacks people of color by design, she says, to illustrate how Chris's world of diverse races, identities, and sexualities forces Abby to reckon with her internalized racism and homophobia.

Work in Progress was conceived, written, cast, produced, and postproduced in Chicago, a rarity for television—in fact, this is the first project from a major studio with a network release to do so. It's a reflection of the cocreators' vision and Wachowski's advocacy.

"I love that we're letting Chicago represent itself as a creative, thriving center for film and the arts," Mason says. The show overturns well-worn imagery like scenes at the Bean and conversations beneath the el tracks. From the Andersonville businesses that benefited from the 35-day shoot to the local cast that walked away with coveted SAG cards, Anglin says the show is a testament to the "camaraderie, grit, and work ethic" that she finds unique to the Chicago film industry. In McEnany's 2016 one-woman show she gave the disclaimer, "what happens here stays here." Thankfully, for the rest of the world, she's ready to share her story and her Chicago. **EW**

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LIT/VIS ART

Crossin' Borders shines light on undocumented queer artists

Brian Herrera's magazine features the work of nine artists creating in a world that won't let them represent themselves.

By S. NICOLE LANE

These days there's no shortage of people making art in response to Trump's xenophobic America and his violent impact on immigrants, but it is rarely the undocumented immigrants themselves whose work is on museum walls. For example, the 2013 exhibition "State of Exception" at the University of Michigan Institute of Humanities Gallery was inspired by anthropologist Jason De León's "Undocumented Migration Project," a study of the violent effects of crossing the border. However, it was the work of Richard Barnes (based in New York) and Amanda Krugliak (based in Ann Arbor, Michigan), artists who responded to the fieldwork, shot video, and photographs along the border, that was on view rather than the work of immigrants who'd risked their lives. Outside of gallery walls, undocumented immigrants are more likely to be portrayed in

the news as crossing the border or in custody, implying criminal actions. A study by the Norman Lear Center found that on television Asian, Black, and female immigrant characters are significantly more often portrayed as criminals or less educated. (Define American, who ran this study, is also a sponsor of *Crossin' Borders*.)

In 2013, around 267,000 undocumented immigrants were living in the United States. Under the Trump administration, an average of 4,219 undocumented immigrants with no criminal background were arrested each month. According to *Crain's Chicago Business*, 44.5 percent of Chicago's immigrant residents in 2016 were from Mexico—the next nations with the most representation were China (6.4 percent) and Poland (5.8 percent). It's imperative for these communities to be given means to represent their own experiences.

Crossin' Borders, a new print magazine, combats the stereotypes and misrepresentation of queer undocumented people of color by collecting voices and work of artists who represent those marginalized identities. The publication focuses on immigrants' own experience of border crossing, exploring the emotionally taxing experience of traumas from the violence of migrating to this country imperil their livelihood. The magazine is a form of resilience bringing undocumented artists together in a tangible product celebrating community, creativity, and the ability to thrive.

The catalyst for the magazine first came in early 2018 when artist and designer Brian Herrera decided to go public about being undocumented. "I noticed a lot of the mainstream media did not really talk about the immigrant experience from an undocumented artist's perspective," he says. "It was hard to relate to a lot of the narratives being told." Herrera turned to the Internet for a sense of community and inspiration. After being awarded a



Crossin' Borders, Issue 001 © JAYME MARTINEZ MASSION

nomination through Define American's first fellowship for undocumented artists in early 2019, he was able to put funds into his project for the magazine and continue that work for the community.

Herrera, born in Veracruz, Mexico, crossed the border and came to Chicago when he was 11 years old. Now 22, he hasn't lived anywhere else. "I started playing around with graffiti a year before I moved to the U.S. and doing more street art when I was in high school here in Chicago," he says. Inspired by his mom, whose side-gig involved photographing drag shows for Latin nights in Boystown, he decided to become more involved with graphic design and Photoshop. He says teaching himself graphic design was another way to elevate his art practice.

Crossin' Borders launched its first issue on November 15, and it highlights the intimate, emotional, and personal artwork of undocumented artists who live on the east coast, midwest, and southern parts of the United States. The empowering debut issue celebrates these artists and features Karla Rosas, an illustrator living in New Orleans whose work expands on the stories and lives of migrant women; Clandestino, a Chicago street artist whose wheat pastes present discussions about gentrification; and Scheherazade Minah, a Black Muslim poet from Nigeria.

Herrera's decision to learn graphic design has paid off—the first issue is nothing short of beautiful. The cover's simple design features a line-drawn brick wall with a single plant flow-

ing through a hole in the center, clearly resembling the wall that divides the borders but also all of the communities that power through. The magazine's design alternates between text and vivid images with brief descriptions by the artist below each piece, allowing the creatives to share their biography and artist statement.

"Print media is super important," Herrera says. "In a digital world where mainstream media is controlled by capitalistic agendas and racist CEOs, having a printed independent publication that you can touch, feel, relate to and learn from, is a radical reminder we are still human and that we depend on each other's communities to thrive."

Herrera hopes to publish issues annually and grow the *Crossin' Borders* team in 2020. "I want our second issue to feature artists from all over the country and have a release event in 2020 here in Chicago," he says.

"Queer Black and Brown DIY art scenes are the roots of uplifting and honoring each other's existence," Herrera says. Chicago queer spaces gave him the courage to accept his own queerness and to "be public about being an undocumented immigrant," Herrera says. "I am thankful for the growth, experiences, and opportunities I found in these spaces, and the plan is to use this publication to contribute to the communities I flourished in so that other Black and Brown folk can empower themselves." 📖

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ARTS & CULTURE



Left to right: Ellenor Riley-Condit, Jesse Case, Elise Parisian, Nate DuFort
© PATRIAC COAKLEY

PODCAST

Scary stories for kids

Unspookable breaks down urban legends and horror lore with the perfect amount of scares.

By **BRIANNA WELLEN**

When Ellenor Riley-Condit was in fifth grade, she learned about the legend of Bloody Mary. At a sleepover, she and two friends looked into the bathroom mirror and said “Bloody Mary” three times, and even though nothing happened they were all too scared to sleep. It wasn’t until much later that Riley-Condit researched the real story behind the conjuring of the spirit who can supposedly tell you your future and thought more about why these stories make us so scared. Now she breaks down scary stories for kids around ages eight to 13 as head writer for the podcast *Unspookable*. The show tells scary stories while dropping in historic and scientific facts as a way to explore where fear comes from and who is in charge of inciting that fear.

“I just know how much we all think and talk about these things, especially on the playground or at sleepovers or at school or any way we can when we’re kids,” Riley-Condit says. “To ask the question what are humans afraid of, it’s a profound philosophical question, and once you start digging into those things, you’re talking about how human con-

sciousness works and how we see other people and all these things about our brain functions. I think being able to introduce some of those more difficult questions, like why are we afraid of people who aren’t like us, these stories are a way to do that.”

Unspookable is the first project from Soundsington Media, a Chicago-based podcast company creating content for kids. Founder Nate DuFort, who has a ten-year-old daughter, created the company when he realized that most podcasts skewed either too young or too old for his daughter, who was quickly developing an interest in horror stories. With Riley-Condit and host Elise Parisian he created a podcast that tackles subjects like Slender Man, vampires, and the Salem witch trials without talking down to children, but still leaving some of the more gruesome details on the cutting-room floor. And each episode manages to include more complex discussions of fear and inclusivity.

“As basic as it sounds, it’s feminist to say maybe the Salem witch trials wouldn’t have happened if the patriarchy didn’t exist,” Riley-Condit says. “It’s feminist to say, Who gets to write the stories? And it’s feminist, and also I hope anti-racist and anti-xenophobic, to really look at who’s in power and how that leads to some of these consequences that involve spooky stuff.”

Soundsington Media has two more projects on the horizon aimed at expanding on the ideals of *Unspookable*. The first is a narrative podcast written by Riley-Condit called *Eddy*,

which follows a young female detective solving a supernatural mystery in her town, with each episode featuring an *X-Files*-esque monster of the week. Another is a yet-to-be-named show focused on the accomplishments of women and people of color related to space exploration. The creators want to continue their own repertoire to make sure as many different voices are represented as possible, and hope that other podcasting companies will take on creating similar content for preteens.

“That my daughter is so attracted to queer voices, female voices, voices of people of color has been great,” DuFort says. “This has to be the best age in history to be raising children because of that.”

Twitter @BriannaWellen

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The Nutcracker at the Joffrey Ballet
CHERYL MANN

DANCE

Mom is the reason for the season in *The Nutcracker*

Joy, grace, and optimism mark Joffrey's last production of the holiday favorite at the Auditorium.

By **OLIVER SAVA**

Parents are under a lot of stress during the holiday season, responsible for creating the magical experience children are promised by popular culture. Parents buy the gifts, decorate the home, and, if hosting, prepare a celebration with all the extra work that entails.

Christopher Wheeldon's 2016 adaptation of *The Nutcracker*, staged one last time at the Auditorium before Joffrey Ballet transfers to the Civic Opera House, is a tribute to the people who invest their time, money, and energy to make the holidays special. Young Marie (Amanda Assucena) is still the person thrust into a Christmas fantasy when she's gifted a nutcracker, but the primary emotional arc follows Marie's Mother (Victoria Jaiani) as she finds love and transforms into a shimmering manifestation of joy, grace, and optimism.

Featuring a story by Brian Selznick, an award-winning children's book author and illustrator who specializes in historical fiction, Wheeldon's *The Nutcracker* takes place in 1892 Chicago during the construction of the World's Columbian Exposition. Marie and her

family live in a small shack on the construction site, and they invite other migrant workers and their families for a modest but jubilant Christmas Eve gathering.

Incorporating elements of folk dancing during the party reinforces a sense of community among the workers, and by featuring a child dancer who uses a wheelchair (Larke Johnson, alternating in the role with Emma Lookatch), the choreography creates an atmosphere of inclusion where everyone is encouraged to join the festivities. The Great Impresario of the Fair (Miguel Angel Blanco) drops by to give the adults bags of coins and put on an impressive shadow play of what the World's Fair will look like upon completion, and the Great Impresario's gentle flirting with Mother becomes something much more passionate in Marie's dream of the future.

This dream shows Marie the wonder of the completed World's Fair, giving the production a striking design rooted in Chicago history while recontextualizing act two's parade of national dances by placing it in a setting that emphasizes cultural exchange. Julian Crouch's

set and costume design heighten the spectacle of the fair by contrasting it with the drabness of the workers' reality, and 59 Productions' elegant projections add an extra layer of magic to the stage with sleek animations and bold graphic designs. Natasha Katz's lighting brings an ethereal quality to the fair with a vibrant mix of purple and pink, evoking the fair's warm season without breaking the winter illusion.

That warmth is at the core of Jaiani's mesmerizing performance as the Queen of the Fair, giving life to the golden statue sculpted by Mother. Jaiani's musicality fills out each phrase of Tchaikovsky's iconic score so that every movement feels like it is compelled by music in the moment rather than predetermined by choreography, enriching the character with spontaneity and emotional vitality. This depth carries over to Mother when she returns for the final scene, receiving the happy ending she deserves for dedicating so much of herself to her family. **✪**

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PREVIEW

Giving grief a voice

Melissa DuPrey's *Good Grief* examines loss, healing, and the power of community.

By REGINA VICTOR

Melissa DuPrey sits across from me, in an updo she swears she never wears, positively radiant even as she discusses one of the most tender topics in America—grief. This contrast in presentation underscores the motivation behind DuPrey's work on her upcoming solo show, *Good Grief*, coproduced at Free Street Theater. "It was not going to be *Good Grief*. It was going to be the story

of me and my mother, and exploring mother-daughter relationships. The third installation [in DuPrey's series of autobiographical solo shows] was always going to be about her. Unfortunately she passed, she was physically and mentally unwell, and suffering."

Her mother's death led DuPrey, who grew up in Humboldt Park, to ask "How can I use that messaging and transmute what I had now experienced through three years of trauma, grief, and processing our history into something meaningful that wasn't just dick jokes, and wasn't just about me?"

Grief and suffering can have a variety of expressions across cultures, and there are stigmas and differences about how that grief is perceived and processed. The ways in which we are allowed to exhibit and care for our emotions is largely based in a conversation about social access and privilege. According to a recent study by the American Academy of Pediatrics, discrimination has adverse effects on the health of Black and Brown people: side effects of racism can include but are not limited to flooding the body with stress hormones

that make the body susceptible to chronic diseases, heart problems, lower birth weights for mothers affected by racism, and lower self-esteem.

"I know multiple people who have lost their parents or multiple people who are still grieving a parent that's still with us and need

to hear a story about being OK with being mad about someone who is not well. And making room for grief in all kinds of forms, because we can definitely grieve people who are still here," says DuPrey. "Society has no longer made space for grieving people."

When DuPrey's mother died three years



Melissa DuPrey in *Good Grief* © ALEJANDRO REYES



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ago, she sought bereavement counseling. Even with the assistance of insurance, DuPrey was unable to find this help amid a forest of waiting lists and sliding scales. She began to seek healing outside of the medical industrial complex, something the show explores by bringing healing to the performance space. DuPrey decided that this piece could be both a “response to the inaccessibility of mental health resources” and “a love letter, the answer to somebody’s prayer.”

DuPrey’s last two solo projects, *SEXomedy* and *SUSHI-frito*, were self-produced—an important and impressive feat for a young Brown woman. *SEXomedy*, which eventually had an off-Broadway run, offered an alternate lens on womanhood, a space where DuPrey and her audience could dissect gendered norms through comedy. *SUSHI-frito* addressed DuPrey’s many intersections of identity as an

GOOD GRIEF

Through 12/21: Mon, Thu, and Fri 6:30 PM, Sat 2:30 PM (performance on Mon 12/16 is industry and also ADA-accessible), Free Street Theater, 1419 W. Blackhawk, 773-772-7248, freestreet.org, advance reservations online for \$5-\$100 donation, pay what you can at the door.

Afro-Latina, and how she navigates the world. “I put adobo on my quinoa,” she says, laughing. Her desire to create work speaking to her own authentic experience and relating directly to community can be traced to her previous work at her artistic home, Free Street Theater, where she’d been general manager and had performed *SUSHI-frito*.

“It just feels right, as Coya Paz [Free Street’s artistic director] has always been my personal and artistic mentor and then became my professional mentor,” says DuPrey, a former member of Teatro Luna, the all-Latina theater troupe Paz cofounded. “They have always been an organization that has aligned with and been true to their mission, even if it’s for pennies on the dollar. They’re trying to get to a point where economic liberation is also part of the combating of the racial and economic segregation . . . How do we make equitable situations racially, sexually and economically?” DuPrey notes that presenting a show like *Good Grief* has a high emotional cost for the performer. A return to Free Street, a familiar space with a history of uplifting community as

a producing partner in this work for their 51st season, was only fitting.

“I’m not the only one who has gone through it [grief], but I am the one charged with having a platform to say it,” says DuPrey. “And I want to say the hard things. I have built an entire platform of my solo work on saying the things that have not been said. Whether it is talking about, you know, nipple hair and ass hair, or an abusive mother that I loved dearly and that loved me dearly, I can’t shy away from it now. The more challenging and traumatic the thing is, the more I have to walk through a longer process to articulate it, mold it, and maybe even vessel it through a lens of comedy in order for people to be able to digest it in a safe way.”

DuPrey adds, “I did not want to put an abuse story onstage without people being able to take care of themselves, which is why I incorporated an immersive healing component where you have to walk through a reflective space to get to the play and walk out of the play in a healing process.”

This practical healing component, which brings practitioners to the audience, is a revolutionary aspect of this performance. DuPrey, a Reiki practitioner herself, has intentionally embedded herself in healing circles for the last ten years. At all ten performances of *Good Grief* there will be between three to five health practitioners on-site, including herbalists, ancestral healers, and Tibetan practitioners of Ayurvedic sound healing able to offer information about the benefits of their healing practices; subsidized or free sessions to audience members via a grant from the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture are also available. DuPrey received the association’s highest-possible monetary award of \$5,000 to support the project.

“The community existed before me, but I have cultivated very strong circles of women who are intelligent, fierce, and loving. So when I put out a call to say, ‘Who are my wellness and healing practitioners in the world who would like to work with me on it?’ I got 70 responses.” At this point, tears spring into DuPrey’s eyes. “And if I ever felt a certain way about my own visibility, the way that I can really capture what I’ve done in Chicago was the fact that after showing up for people for the last ten years, them showing up for me in this way was the most impactful and informative thing of who I am in Chicago and in my communities because they came through.” □

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PROFILE

Denise McGowan Tracy's very merry Christmas wish

A new children's holiday musical means life is more than a cabaret for the longtime producer.

By CATEY SULLIVAN

Some artists hone their craft at college or conservatories. Denise McGowan Tracy ran away with the Ice Follies. Her time on the road booking venues, transport, and lodging for the megapopular 1970s skating show served her well. By 1981, she was booking national talent for Byfield's, the Pump Room's legendary nightclub (owned and operated by Lettuce En-

tertain You), providing the likes of Ellen DeGeneres and Karen Mason with early exposure.

Following that, she was in charge of public entertainment at Navy Pier, bringing everyone from Santa to Sarah McLachlan to the tourist destination. For the past 12 seasons, she's been overseeing *Monday Night Live!*, the cabaret she created with Beckie Menzie for Petterino's, the Lettuce Entertain You

restaurant next to the Goodman Theatre. There, you might stumble onto performances by touring casts (*Hamilton*, *Wicked*, *Cats Out of Costume!*), Lithuanian dignitaries, or local musical theater royalty, backed by pianist Menzie and performing in an intimate brass-and-wood dining room where the walls are covered with autographed caricatures of showbiz luminaries.



Denise McGowan Tracy

KASIA JAROSZ

When a gaggle of singing elves took the *MNL* mike shortly before Thanksgiving, it was a harbinger of Tracy's next act: a new Christmas musical.

I know, I know. Swing a bag of plum pudding in any direction this time of year and you'll splat into a Crumpet or a Scrooge or a Sugar Plum Fairy. Still, Tracy's Equity launch of *Eleanor's Very Merry Christmas Wish* (scored by Kathleen Butler-Duplessis and running through December 29 at the Greenhouse Theater Center) comes with a singular pedigree: The author has spent the last 30 years producing remarkably enduring shows. It's also wholly lacking a feel-good origin story.

"No, it wasn't pretty," Tracy says of the show's genesis. "Back at Navy Pier, I once saw this little girl sitting in Santa's lap saying 'I don't want this,' 'Don't bring me that.' 'If you bring me this, it has to be this color.' I loved her spirit but I was like, 'wow, that's a little

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demanding. How'd you like to be the poor toy stuck with that kid?"

"And then I decided to flip it. What if it was a toy, asking Santa for a friend?" she said.

Biblioteka Brightside published Tracy's tale of a lonely North Pole rag doll in 2015,

RR ELEANOR'S VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS WISH

Through 12/29: Wed 10 AM, Sat 10 AM and 2 PM, Sun 1 and 5 PM; also Mon 12/23 and Fri 12/27, 10 AM and 2 PM; Sun 12/29, 1 PM only; no performance Wed 12/25, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, greenhousetheater.org, \$29.50.

RR MONDAY NIGHT LIVE!

Mondays 7:30 PM, Petterino's, 150 N. Dearborn, 312-422-0150, petterinos.com, \$19.95 food and beverage minimum per person.

but she wasn't altogether satisfied with the endeavor. "I kept thinking the characters needed music," she said. Enter Butler-Duplessis, whose score ranges from a silly-smart rap about wrapping paper to an anthemic finale engineered to make you misty.

It's not been smooth sailing for the project. Over the summer, Tracy lost the theater she'd originally booked for the show. "It set us back. A lot of people told me it was a sign. Put it off for a year. But you know what? No. None of us knows how much time we have. I'm 63 years old. I'm 75 pounds overweight. Sometimes I feel like I went from debutante to dowager inside of a week. Anyway, I don't know what's going to happen. Nobody does. Why would I wait?" she says.

She is also accustomed to dealing with last-minute potential catastrophes.

There was the time, for example, that the sound went out right before *Monday Night Live*, taking the mike and pianist Beckie Menzie's keyboard with it. Tracy got on stage and started singing Janis Joplin's "Mercedes Benz" a cappella. "I picked it because it was the longest song I knew. I did it while my husband and Beckie were working frantically trying to get the power back on. I had just finished the song and was about to start in on this long story when they got a work-around."

Menzie is *MNL*'s not-so-secret weapon, and was crucial to shaping *Eleanor's* November teaser.

"I've never seen her stumped. Once night

at Petterino's we had a group of dignitaries from Lithuania show up, and they wanted to sing their national song. Nobody had music for it. Beckie found it on her phone and played it without a hitch. She's magnificent."

Tracy says booking for Byfield's was also invaluable in setting the stage for *Monday Night Live*. "I think back—Rich Melman (Lettuce Entertain You founder) asked me to take on Byfield's when I was 24, and I'm sure people thought we were off our rockers. But we got Ellen DeGeneres her first cabaret gig in Chicago. Yakov Smirnov came through. Karen Mason. It was this extraordinary mishmash incubator of local and national talent. It was an amazing experience."

It was also sometimes frustrating. Tracy was shocked—shocked!—to find that producing-while-female came with singular challenges. "Sometimes I'd wonder 'would they be talking to me like this if my name was Dennis?'" Tracy recalled. Nevertheless, she persisted.

After the Byfield's closed, Tracy pitched the cabaret idea to Petterino's. They offered her a six-week tryout. More than 500 shows later, the show goes on. In the early days, Tracy had to reach out to talent. Now the talent tends to come to her.

"We had Firebrand [Chicago's feminist musical theater company] doing some 9 to 5 numbers when this girl came up to me and was like, 'Hi, um, what is this? If I'm in a local show can we perform?' And I was all, 'Sure. We can help you sell some tickets, increase your visibility a little. What show are you in?' The next morning I have this e-mail from *Hamilton*. They want to perform."

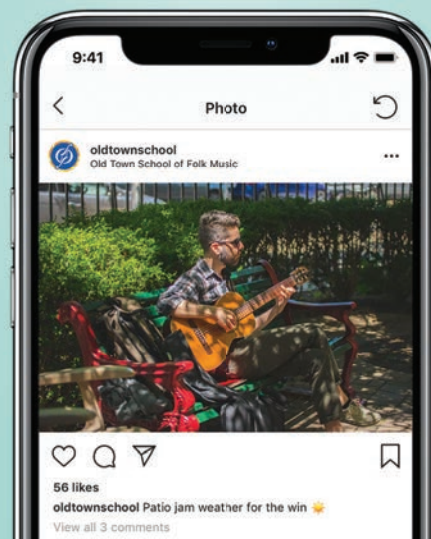
Still, for all her experience Tracy is violating a cardinal rule of producing with *Eleanor's*: Funding came from backers who saw early readings of the show, and from Tracy herself. "I know. You're never supposed to use your own money. But I decided to put my money where my mouth is," she says.

That also means putting Santa in the lobby after every performance, allowing parents to avoid the chaos of mall Santas.

"For me, one of the greatest joys of the season is watching kids' reactions to the show. And hanging out with Santa after," Tracy said. "I hope the premiere here sparks other theaters looking for a new family-friendly holiday show. But no matter what, this whole project continually reminds me what Christmas is all about." **■**

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OPENING

Mommy issues

Another Medea flips genders, but offers little insight.

In Aaron Mark's one-man, 90-minute *Another Medea*, Marcus—a gay, cis male contemporary version of the mythical title character—discusses (spoiler alert if you aren't familiar with the 2,000+-year-old tragedy that's been adapted by everyone from Euripides to Luis Alfaro) murdering his twin daughters. "If I can do it, anyone can," Marcus says gravely. It's a moment clearly intended to give the audience introspective and empathetic pause.

There-but-for-the-grace-of-whatever, we might all be driven to such monstrosity, yes? No. There is nothing to empathize with here, despite the script's narrative insistence that we do so because Marcus is emotionally fragile because his lover spurned him. He also calls his mother the c-word. (Little more is said about the mother, but the insinuation is clear: this is her fault as much as her son's.) FFS.

Medea as mythology is one thing. But Cuckoo's Theater's production isn't myth. This Medea is a man who makes shitty choices and then—when his decisions turn out badly—decides to kill his daughters and his ex, and then spend 90 minutes explaining that if his mom and lover had only treated him better, he wouldn't have had to murder anybody. To be fair, Marcus also mentions "psychotic episodes," but with the same brevity and depth as someone reporting they had bologna for lunch. Director Sara Carranza gets a capable performance from Marc James, but they're both trapped in a script that has nothing to say except hey, this guy was driven to murder, but you can't blame him because his mother and his ex hurt his feelings. If there's an audience for this, it's Aaron Mark. And he should take every seat in the theater. —CATEY SULLIVAN **ANOTHER MEDEA** Through 12/28: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM; Sat 12/21 and 12/28, 3 and 8 PM, Den Theater, 1333 N. Milwaukee, 773-697-3830, thecuckoostheater.com, \$30.



RR Rose's turn

The simpleton of St. Olaf steals the show in Hell in a Handbag's latest *Golden Girls* spoof.

Trivia time: what *Golden Girls* character still believes in Santa? You don't need multiple-choice answers to know it's gotta be sweet dumb Rose Nylund. In Hell in a Handbag's latest installment in its long-running series, *The Golden Girls: The Lost Episodes*, Rose (Ed Jones, always right on the money) faces a crisis of belief, and also must confront her fearsome Aunt Inga (Steve Kimbrough), the Cheese Empress of St. Olaf. Meanwhile, Sophia (Ryan Oates) snipes, Dorothy (Hell in a Handbag's artistic director David Cerda, who also wrote the show) delivers withering glances, and Blanche (Grant Drager) puts the moves on a jolly old elf or two—including a lascivious take on "Santa Baby" where she goes toe-to-toe (and other body parts) with her romantic rival.

On opening night, some problems with the light-board gave host Lori Lee (who also plays sidekick Flo) a chance for more audience interaction than just the usual trivia contest, and she delivered with witty aplomb. If you've seen past versions of this show, you'll know what to expect: friendly (if sometimes filthy) ripostes,

ridiculous plot twists (including a segment channeling *It's a Wonderful Life*), and over-the-top physical comedy (nimble staged by director/choreographer Stevie Love). It's sometimes sloppy and often obvious—but at its heart, the show celebrates what it means to make a family of affinity at the holidays, and that's worth believing in, at any age. —KERRY REID **THE GOLDEN GIRLS: THE LOST EPISODES—HOLIDAY EDITION, VOL. 2** Through 12/28: days and times vary, see website, [Mary's Attic](http://Mary'sAttic.com), 5400 N. Clark, 800-838-3006, handbagproductions.org, \$27 advance, \$31 at the door.

RR Searching for a miraculous menorah

Grace and the Hanukkah Miracle is a warmhearted tour through one Jewish family's history

Immersive holiday shows in Chicago usually mean Halloween fare—haunted houses lend themselves naturally to the form, after all. But Chicago Immersive makes its inaugural bow with a family-friendly Hanukkah show so ecumenical in appeal it even takes place in a Lutheran

The Golden Girls: The Lost Episodes—Holiday Edition, Vol. 2 RICK AGUILAR

church basement. Part scavenger hunt, part history lesson, part time-traveling adventure, the show involves a search for a menorah that belonged to the family of Grace (Nicole Bloomsmith), a contemporary woman who has only photos (and the audience) to help her piece together the puzzle of what happened to the beloved artifact, which disappeared around the time her great-grandparents left Germany ahead of Hitler.

The conceit for the show (created by Anderson Lawfer, Bloomsmith, Becca Braun, and director Jacqueline Stone) is that Grace's husband, Irving (Lawfer), is also a sheriff from the 1800s, whose time-traveling knight friend from the Middle Ages, Cyrus (Julian Stroop), will take us into the past through a series of cunning rooms (designed by John Wilson). Here, we must listen for clues in order to unlock a series of hidden boxes guiding us to where the menorah is. Along the way, we meet Grace's daughter and her rabbi wife, who give us thumbnail lessons on the meaning of Hanukkah; Mildred (Bloomsmith) and Jonathan (Andrew Bailes), her great-grandparents, as they wait in a "safe room" in Germany before fleeing the country; and her vaudevilian grandfather, Eli (Dan Cobbler), as he warms up for his Catskills act in the 1950s.

The show unfolds in just under an hour, and the lessons of listening to each other and working together (whether as a family or as an audience bent on solving a mystery) have applications beyond the holiday season. And at the end, there's a delicious little nosh of latkes.

—KERRY REID **GRACE AND THE HANUKKAH MIRACLE** Through 1/5: Sat 1 and 4 PM, Sun 2 PM; no show Sun 12/15, Grace Lutheran Church, 1430 South Blvd., Evanston, 773-236-2172, chicagoimmersive.com, \$25.

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The Two Popes

REVIEW

Two Popes, two performances

But the buddy movie leaves us with little hope for the future of the Catholic church.

By ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB

Adapted from the 2017 play *The Pope* and written by Anthony McCarten (*The Theory of Everything*, *Darkest Hour*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*), *The Two Popes* is an imaginative take on a pivotal moment in the modern history of the Catholic Church. Pope Benedict XVI unexpectedly announced his resignation in 2013—the first pope to do so in nearly 600 years—citing a “lack of strength of mind and body” due to age. The conclave to select his successor occurred a month later, with Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio elected as the new pontiff, taking the name Francis. *The Two Popes* explores the presumption that the details of Benedict’s resignation are a more intriguing story than a simple retirement.

The film starts in 2005 at the papal conclave following the death of Pope John Paul II. Bergoglio (Jonathan Pryce) places second to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Anthony Hopkins) in a series of four successive ballots requiring a two-thirds majority of electors to select the new pope. Ratzinger ascends to the papacy, taking the pontifical name Benedict.

It is at this point that the film takes creative

license to build the central conceit: Several years into the papacy, Benedict’s church is embattled by scandals, and Bergoglio—a fierce critic of Benedict’s direction—is on the verge of retirement. When the pontiff summons Bergoglio to a meeting under the guise of interrogating the reasoning behind the cardinal’s desire to hang up his robes, what instead transpires is a revelation from Benedict that he is also on the verge of giving up his post. Benedict and his soon-to-be successor undertake a series of philosophical and dogmatic discussions and disagreements about the nature of faith and forgiveness, and the direction of a church struggling to maintain relevance in the modern world.

The screenplay by McCarten effectively balances moments of levity and weight, while director Fernando Meirelles (*City of God*, *The Constant Gardener*) competently guides the film through a series of flashbacks into the early life of Bergoglio. Ultimately though, the success or failure of the film rests on the two pontificate performers who are positioned as the players in a mismatched buddy comedy. Pryce in particular offers a charming perfor-

mance, expressing a teasing and probing wit that plays well off the stoic suspiciousness of Hopkins. For his part, Hopkins crafts a touching portrayal of Benedict, whose regret at never truly opening himself up to the world outside of the church humanizes him and undermines the conservative emotional walls he’s constructed over the decades.

The two popes are ostensibly opposites, Benedict a conservative, ivory tower academic theologian, who comes to lament his existence outside of the realm of earthly concerns, and Bergoglio, a cardinal of the common folk, living amongst his flock and focused on modernization and reform. Yet each man harbors a blotted past that they struggle to reckon with; Benedict fails in his handling of a series of crises including the cover-up of the widespread child sexual abuse claims against the church, and Bergoglio—who we see as a young man (played by Juan Minujín) in a series of flashbacks in 1970s Argentina—is likewise consumed by his acquiescence to his home country’s military dictatorship that killed untold thousands.

The film largely suffers in its narrative provision of absolution to its flawed protagonists. The men forgive each other for their sins without a rehabilitative or restorative process for the numerous victims of their malfeasance. The cycle of absolutist power continues, as the Vatican moves on in a tidy passage of power from one pope to the other, leaving us with little sense that the church is capable of doing the meaningful work of confessing its past failures and providing a beacon of hope for the future faithful. **A**

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Pictured: Ayanna Bria Bakari and Mary Beth Fisher. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

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Synonyms

NOW PLAYING

RR The Murder of Fred Hampton

Chicago native Howard Alk helped found Second City in 1959 and made a name for himself in the '60s and '70s as a documentary cinematographer, editor, and director. His debut feature, *American Revolution 2* (1969, codirected by Mike Gray) looked at the Black Panther Party in Chicago; this follow-up, a profile of Panther leader Fred Hampton, unexpectedly turned into a true-crime story in December 1969 when Hampton and another Panther were fatally shot during the Chicago Police Department's notorious raid on a Panther crash pad in West Town. The documentary (1971) presents Hampton as a charismatic figure given to violent revolutionary rhetoric, but after his death the focus shifts to Cook County state's attorney Ed Hanrahan, whose report exonerating the police department was treated as gospel truth by the *Chicago Tribune* but belied by a wealth of physical evidence at the scene of the crime. As a first draft of history, this is invaluable, though its topical relevance has hardly diminished. —J.R. JONES 88 min. Wed 12/11, 7 PM. Justice Hotel

RR Russian Ark

One of the most staggering technical achievements in cinema—a single shot lasting 95 minutes while moving through 33 rooms in the world's largest museum, the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (which also encompasses the Winter Palace). Part pageant and museum tour, part theme-park ride and historical meditation, this 2002 feature also traverses two centuries of czarist Russia, with offscreen filmmaker Alexander Sokurov engaged in an ongoing dialogue with an on-screen 19th-century French diplomat. Sokurov used close to 2,000 actors and extras and three live orchestras in making what may be the world's only unedited single-take feature as well as the longest Steadicam sequence ever shot. The problem with these feats is that they threaten to overwhelm the film's content, both as complex historical commentary and as aesthetic and theoretical gesture. In Russian with subtitles. —JONATHAN ROSENBAUM 99 min. Sun 12/8, 7 PM. Doc Films

RR Synonyms

In the opening scene of *Synonyms*, Yoav, a former Israeli soldier who's run away to France, spends a night squatting in an upscale Paris apartment, only to have all of his belongings stolen while taking a shower. He's rescued from freezing to death by a wealthy, cultured young couple—who quickly become enamored with him—but no amount of chic clothing or monetary

gifts can mask his raw inner turmoil. Questions of identity, nationalism, ethics, masculinity, shame, and assimilation abound as Yoav (played brilliantly and slightly unhinged by newcomer Tom Mercier) attempts to leave the past behind, including his native Hebrew language, and rebuild his life. Directed by Nadav Lapid, *Synonyms* is smart, stunning, and requires multiple viewings to peel back all its layers. —JAMIE LUDWIG 123 min. Gene Siskel Film Center

RR Varda by Agnès

A mixture of live interviews, film clips, archival footage, and interjectory direct to camera discourse, *Varda by Agnès* weaves through Agnès Varda's more than 65-year career of inventive filmmaking. *Varda by Agnès* serves a dual role, working both as detailed introduction for newcomers and a thought-provoking retrospective for cinephiles still mourning the passing of the immensely curious director earlier this year. The auteur's work doesn't so much blur the lines between documentary and fiction as it knits the two forms together like yarn into imaginative multitextured fabrics. In this film, Varda reveals the guiding principles behind her work—"inspiration, creation, and sharing"—and over the course of a two-hour personal essay, she guides us on her creative journey, jumping across time and space, providing insight into her technique, methods, and artistic philosophy. As Varda notes, "People are the heart of my work. Real people." And the creations she leaves behind provide clear evidence throughout, poignantly sharing the humanity within us all and providing inspiration for generations of future storytellers. —ADAM MULLINS-KHATIB 115 min. Music Box Theatre

RR White Snake

This 2019 Chinese film boasts stunning computer-generated animation and a fairytale-esque storyline about a white snake demon who loses her memory only to fall in love with the ordinary man who saves her. Together the man and the white snake demon set out to try and find out who she really is, all the while battling the dark forces who seek to keep them apart. The dizzying action sequences peppered throughout are breathtaking, seamlessly marrying the grace and fluidity of a kung fu movie to the artful flourishes of high-fantasy. At times a silly adventurous romp, and at others an unexpectedly adult meditation on romance and self, directors Amp Wong and Ji Zhao intended their story as a prequel to one of China's four great folktales, the Legend of the White Snake. In Chinese with subtitles. —NINA LI COOMES 99 min. Gene Siskel Film Center



From left to right: Doug Kaplan (aka MrDougDoug) and Max Allison (aka Mukqs) are Pepper Mill Rondo. The two of them also founded the Hausu Mountain label in 2012.

© TINO AT FOTO QUETZAL

When Christmas music passes beyond human comprehension

As Pepper Mill Rondo, Max Allison and Doug Kaplan find the horrifying and the sublime in holiday kitsch.

By **NOAH BERLATSKY**

Experimental music often pushes at the edges of the unlistenable: the assaultive skronk of free jazz, the relentless, undifferentiated roar of harsh noise wall, the breakneck ceiling-fan-to-the-face tempos of death metal. Across genres and traditions, artists work toward the same goal: creating sound worlds so intolerably loud and dissonant that listeners collapse with their brains oozing from every orifice in their skulls.

And yet, despite their fierce effort and cruel inventiveness, their giant amps and tortured electronics, none of these artists has ever created music as soul-destroying as playlists

filled with the likes of “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” and “Frosty the Snowman” looping continually for a month in every grocery store and mall. When it comes to music of terror and torment, Brötzmann, Foetus, and Deicide are mere pikers compared to the purveyors of Christmas kitsch.

Chicago experimental stalwarts Max Allison (aka Mukqs) and Doug Kaplan (aka MrDougDoug) have heard the tinny trumpet of holiday despair, and they’ve decided that if they can’t defeat it, they will simply let it consume them. The new album by their duo, Pepper Mill Rondo, titled *It’s Christmas Time!* (released Wednesday, December 11, on their own Hausu

Mountain label), is 70 minutes of deconstructed Christmas collages, samples, and fractured karaoke carols. Like much Christmas music—and like much experimental music—it provides its audience with a fascinating exercise in horrified masochism.

“A really important part of this project is this idea of sensory overload,” Kaplan says. “Not just with the amount of content that’s being blasted at you, but the length of the album—it’s important for us that the album is a kind of a transportive marathon listening session. It’s meant to push you into the furthest zone possible.”

The duo don’t intend the album as a parody

so much as a cracked mirror held up to the tide of Christmas detritus, and to all the queasily overwhelming emotions associated with it. “We only wanted to include samples and sources that we have had a connection to,” Allison says. “Songs that we like, or songs that we really hate, or sounds that really weirded us out.”

On “Fresh Christmas Aire,” for instance, the two artists sample, loop, and demolish snippets from the Christmas recordings of synthy new age prog rockers Mannheim Steamroller. The result is an ecstasy of irritating but groovy noodling, like Muzak on steroids cheerily trying to claw its way out of your cranium. Kaplan says that for him the track was inspired in part by his secular Jewish family’s trip to a Mannheim Steamroller concert. His mom, who loves Christmas music, was delighted, and Kaplan, who’s a prog rock fan, was delighted too—but his father, Kaplan says, was “having a low-key panic attack.” Chip Davis’s version of “Deck the Halls” had accomplished what experimental musicians are always trying to do—provoke transcendent bliss and/or a flight response.

The Pepper Mill Rondo track “The War on Xmas” gets at the contradictions of the season from a more overtly political angle. Kaplan worked on this track alone, assembling and juxtaposing joyful snippets of kids singing Christmas carols with right-wing ranters fulminating about the threat posed to the Constitution and the country by people saying “Happy holidays.”

“I am proud to have led the charge against the assault on our cherished and beautiful phrase ‘Merry Christmas,’” declares Tucker Carlson in his unmistakably oleaginous tones. Then someone even more unhinged starts to fume and bluster about how he told a Starbucks barista that his name was “Merry Christmas,” forcing the coffee shop to put those words on a cup. The message is clear: everyone must celebrate Christmas all the time. Listening to the track, you can feel the album closing in around you, and all its ➔

wilco winterlude



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"One major side effect of the Christmas album," says Allison, "is deep temporal confusion for both of us." TINO AT FOTO QUETZAL



Not all Christmas music has to involve dis-oriented suffocation, of course. Some holiday songs can be appreciated in the straightforward way you enjoy pretty songs or pop favorites. Allison notes that he loves the carol "O Holy Night," and is a lifelong Mariah Carey fan. "All I Want for Christmas Is You" didn't make it onto *It's Christmas Time!* in any form, though—in part because Allison and Kaplan weren't trying to create listenable, enjoyable, traditionally good Christmas songs such as the Pogues' "Fairytale of New York" or Destiny's Child's "Opera of the Bells."

Instead, *It's Christmas Time!* is more in the tradition of Mike Spalla's "Jingle Cats" novelty recordings—for the first, 1993's *Meowy Christmas*, he sampled more than 1,000 assorted cat noises to make 20 songs, and he subsequently created Christmas magic/anti-magic using the sounds of dogs or babies. Spalla's brilliant recordings served as an inspiration for Kaplan and Allison's own meticulous, obsessive quest to create music so intense that markers like "good" and "bad" fall away and loathing and delight become indistinguishable. Pepper Mill Rondo has stared into the seasonal abyss, and in its cold depths they have discovered a harsh truth. No music is as extreme as Christmas music.

continued from 25

cute samples of Oscar the Grouch and slowed-down burping versions of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" start to sound less like a cheery goof and more like a threat. You're going to be trapped in this Starbucks listening to Christmas music forever.

The collective endurance experiment that our culture conducts with its approach to Christmas music has begun earlier and earlier over the years—the holly jollies and inescapable bells routinely begin on Thanksgiving. For Kaplan and Allison, creating *It's Christmas Time!* involved submitting to holiday cheer even sooner. They started the project early in the fall, and Kaplan says that when he woke up to snow on Halloween after working on Christmas music all night, he thought he'd somehow slept through several months. "One major side effect of the Christmas album is deep temporal confusion for both of us," Allison says.

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THANK YOU CHICAGO



PICK OF THE WEEK

Electronic math-rock masters Battles reinvent themselves as a duo on *Juice B Crypts*

BATTLES, GUERRILLA TOSS

Sun 12/8, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, sold out. 18+

ATIBA JEFFERSON

FOUNDED AS A FOUR-PIECE in New York City in 2002, quirky electronic math-rock band Battles soon established itself as a force in its genre thanks to its multilayered melodies, cavorting grooves, and danceable beats. Founding keyboardist and vocalist Tyondai Braxton—who also played guitar, along with Ian Williams and Dave Konopka—departed after the band's successful first LP, 2007's *Mirrored* (Warp), leaving a trio of Williams (formerly of Don Caballero and Storm & Stress), Konopka, and drummer John Stanier (formerly of Helmet and still in Tomahawk). The transition was surprisingly smooth, despite Williams taking over on electronics in addition to playing guitar—literally single-handedly at times. Konopka left the band in 2018, and the remaining duo of Williams and Stanier have a new album, October's *Juice B Crypts* (Warp), that's totally on-brand. As the driving compositional force, Williams carries forward Battles' love of scales, arpeggios, and polyrhythmic sequences. But

he's pushed them even further in tonality and melodic construction, going heavier on the synths to create the band's most alien-sounding album yet. Stanier, who grounds the music's rhythms with propulsive, syncopated beats, plays it straighter than on previous releases, acting as the linchpin to Williams's multilayered madness. Lead single "Titanium 2 Step," which features abstract vocals by Sal Principato of New York no-wave band Liquid Liquid, is one of the most radio-friendly tracks on the LP. But the album maintains a dichotomy between catchiness and near cacophony, such as when guest vocalist Xenia Rubinos leads a wailing intro over synth squeals on the back half of "A Loop So Nice . . ." / "They Played It Twice." And on "Sugar Foot," featuring Jon Anderson of Yes alongside Taiwanese psych band Prairie WWWW, unorthodox vocal structures and harmonies create another type of contrast. *Juice B Crypts* is a masterpiece of experimental electronica. —SCOTT MORROW



Abjo @ COURTESY THE ARTIST

THURSDAY 5

ABJO Khingz and Mic Flont open. 8 PM, Subterranean, 2011 W. North, \$10. 21+

I first heard the music of San Diego native Abjo, aka Abraham Joseph, when I stumbled on his 2014 Soulection White Label EP. A nearly perfect hybrid of fractured beat making and laid-back R&B that simultaneously glides and staggers, it remains one of my favorite releases of the decade. Though Abjo has continued to put out new material since then, he fell under my radar, and I mostly lost touch—which was my mistake, because checking in half a decade later confirms that he's still great. Abjo self-released two albums in 2019: The first, *Dilla's House*, pays tribute to rapper and producer J. Dilla by mixing samples and raps from the icon's recordings into a woozy, distorted stew that sounds a bit like a dub remix of Flying Lotus but ultimately belches and pulses down its own oddly gargling drainpipe. The second, a collection of experimental sketches and loops called *Loop.Wav*, is even weirder. "Know" sounds like a dreamy pop hook has wandered into a slowly disintegrating car wash; "Phase Trap" suggests a battle between a Steve Reich composition and an advertising jingle; "Love Theme" evokes giant lumbering crustaceans strolling on the beach together, appendage in appendage. The album feels like it's fallen through a portal from a squishier, more disoriented dimension, where all beats ooze and Abjo is as famous as he should be. —NOAH BERLATSKY

OMAR APOLLO Dijon and Silver Sphere open. 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, 2047 N. Milwaukee, \$20. ALL

Omar Apollo, born Omar Velasco, arrived in the spotlight 21st-century style. The singer-songwriter wrote some tunes on his guitar after going ➔

DEC 7



CHANTÉ MOORE

DEC 8 - 10



LOS LOBOS

DEC 11



DAN RODRIGUEZ

DEC 12



DAMIEN ESCOBAR

DEC 15



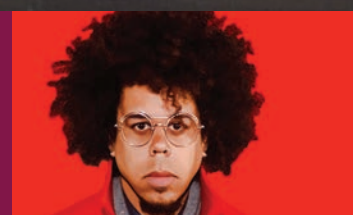
**JANE LYNCH
SWINGIN' LITTLE CHRISTMAS W/
KATE FLANNERY & TIM DAVIS**

DEC 16



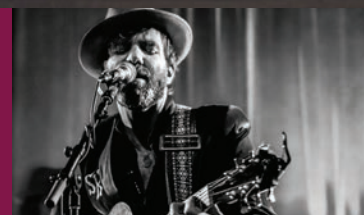
**JUMP, LITTLE CHILDREN
WITH HULA HI-FI**

DEC 17



**JAKE CLEMONS
OF THE E-STREET BAND**

DEC 18



**STEPHEN KELLOGG
WITH TONY LUCCA**

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DEC 21



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DEC 22



**CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC BRUNCH
MERRY AND BRIGHT**

DEC 21 - 23



**MICHAEL MCDERMOTT
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DEC 25



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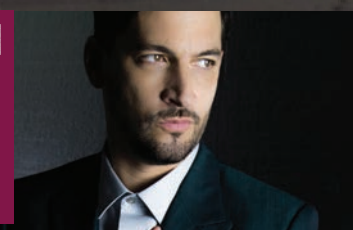
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JAN 4



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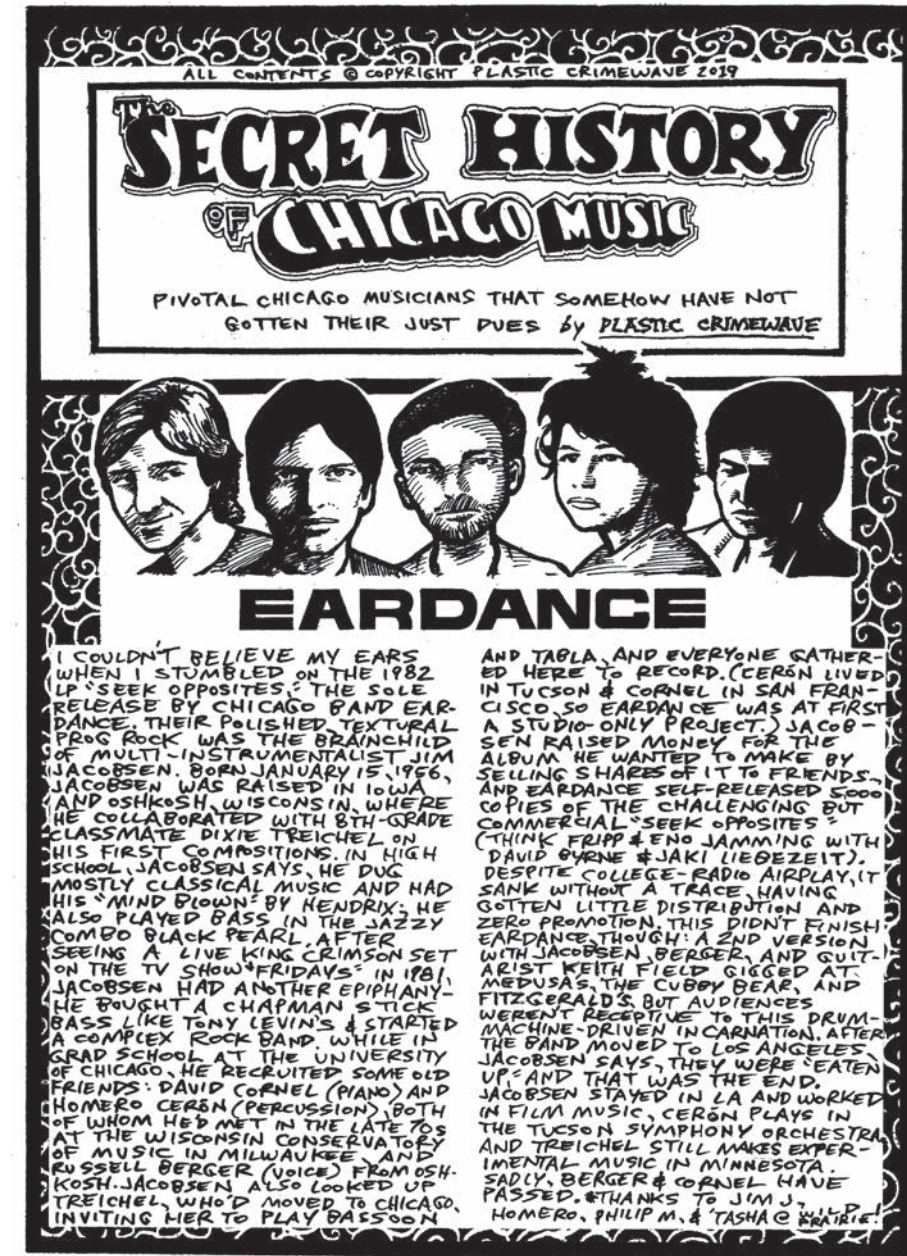
MUSIC

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through a bad breakup, uploaded them to a few streaming platforms, and woke up one day to find that he'd racked up tens of thousands of listens to his single "Ugotme" overnight. Since then his popularity has continued to rise, and it's easy to hear why. Now 22, Apollo defies easy categorization: as he declares on "Hijo de Su Madre," from his 2018 debut EP, *Stereo*, "You ain't ever seen a Brown boy like this," and it's not entirely bravado speaking. The eclectic 80s sound of his tunes owes more than a little to Prince; Apollo's shape-shifting music moves from irresistible funk to dreamy retro soul to bedroom pop, with occasional touches of rap and reggaeton, sometimes all on the same track. He anchors "Ashamed" with a warm, soulful croon, climbing into a falsetto that can glide smoothly or turn staccato. Though he's impeccably bilingual, Apollo mostly sings in English, and his unabashedly romantic tunes recall the torchy forlornness of traditional Mexican ballads as well as the brown-eyed soul that emerged among Latinx musicians in California and Texas from the 60s through the 80s. At this show—where Apollo will be accompanied by drummer Joey Medrano, bassist Manny Barajas, and guitarist Oscar Emilio—he'll perform tunes from *Stereo* and this year's more polished, funk-leaning EP *Friends*. Blessed with a charismatic stage persona and an earnest charm, Apollo shines in live performances, and it seems inevitable that his career will continue its ascent. —CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON

TIM DAISY *Daisy plays solo, then in a duo with guitarist Andrew Clinkman. 9 PM, Elastic, 3429 W. Diversey, Suite 208, \$10.*

I first wrote about Tim Daisy for the *Reader* 16 years ago. The occasion was a record-release concert by Triage, a trio with saxophonist Dave Rempis and bassist Jason Ajemian. "Daisy is the rare drummer who makes me look forward to his solos," I concluded. "With his elastic sense of time and imaginative use of bells and cymbals, he makes unexpected accents sound like inevitable, even crucial gestures." At the time, Daisy was a ubiquitous accompanist; in addition to his role in Triage, he was a steady member of Dragons 1976 and the Vandermark 5. Since then he's come into his own as a bandleader and composer. Vox Arcana, his trio with clarinetist James Falzone and Fred Lonberg-Holm, used bristling improvisation to artfully smudge the lines between swinging jazz grooves and elegant chamber-music forms. While both Falzone and Lonberg-Holm have left town, they reunite with Daisy semiannually to form the core of Celebration Sextet, Fulcrum Ensemble, and Vox 4, each of which extends a particular aspect of Daisy's genre-mixing aesthetic. And though everything I wrote about his drumming in 2003 still applies, his playing has evolved too. The radios and turntables that he often sets up next to his drum kit enable him to add a dimension of collage to anything he's playing—these days, for example, he skews toward odd records and random radio captures a la English tabletop guitarist Keith Rowe. And in Vox Arcana and its spin-offs he's also played marimba, adding glassy harmonies and winding melodies to his tool kit. The first set of this concert features three pieces from a pair of recent solo percussion recordings issued by Daisy's label, Relay Recordings. "Space Within Lim-



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THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

PIVOTAL CHICAGO MUSICIANS THAT SOMEHOW HAVE NOT GOTTEN THEIR JUST DUES by PLASTIC CRIMEWAVE



EARDANCE

I COULDN'T BELIEVE MY EARS WHEN I STUMBLED ON THE 1982 LP "SEEK OPPOSITES," THE SOLE RELEASE BY CHICAGO BAND EARDANCE. THEIR POLISHED TEXTURAL PROG ROCK WAS THE BRANCHCHILD OF MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST JIM JACOBSEN. BORN JANUARY 15, 1966, JACOBSEN WAS RAISED IN IOWA, AND OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN, WHERE HE COLLABORATED WITH 8TH-GRADE CLASSMATE DIXIE TREICHEL ON HIS FIRST COMPOSITIONS. IN HIGH SCHOOL, JACOBSEN SAYS, HE DUG MOSTLY CLASSICAL MUSIC AND HAD HIS "MIND BLOWN" BY HENDRIX. HE ALSO PLAYED BASS IN THE JAZZY COMBO BLACK PEARL. AFTER SEEING A LIVE KING CRIMSON SET ON THE TV SHOW "FRIDAYS" IN 1981, JACOBSEN HAD ANOTHER EPIPHANY—HE BOUGHT A CHAPMAN STICK BASS LIKE TONY LEVIN'S & STARTED A COMPLEX ROCK BAND. WHILE IN GRAD SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, HE RECRUITED SOME OLD FRIENDS: DAVID CORNEL (PIANO) AND HOMERO CEREN (PERCUSSION), BOTH OF WHOM HE'D MET IN THE LATE 70S AT THE WISCONSIN CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC IN MILWAUKEE, AND RUSSELL BERGER (VOICE) FROM OSHKOSH. JACOBSEN ALSO LOOKED UP TREICHEL, WHO'D MOVED TO CHICAGO, INVITING HER TO PLAY BASSOON AND TABLA, AND EVERYONE GATHERED HERE TO RECORD. (CEREN LIVED IN TUCSON & CORNEL IN SAN FRANCISCO, SO EARDANCE WAS AT FIRST A STUDIO-ONLY PROJECT.) JACOBSEN RAISED MONEY FOR THE ALBUM HE WANTED TO MAKE BY SELLING SHARES OF IT TO FRIENDS, AND EARDANCE SELF-RELEASED 5000 COPIES OF THE CHALLENGING BUT COMMERCIAL "SEEK OPPOSITES" (THINK FRIPP & ENO JAMMING WITH DAVID BYRNE & JAKI LIEBEZEIT). DESPITE COLLEGE-RADIO AIRPLAY, IT SANK WITHOUT A TRACE, HAVING GOTTEN LITTLE DISTRIBUTION AND ZERO PROMOTION. THIS DIDN'T FINISH EARDANCE, THOUGH: A 2ND VERSION WITH JACOBSEN, BERGER, AND GUITARIST KEITH FIELD GIGGED AT MEDUSAS, THE CUBBY BEAR, AND FITZGERALD'S, BUT AUDIENCES WEREN'T RECEPTIVE TO THIS DRUM-MACHINE-DRIVEN IN-CARNATION. AFTER THE BAND MOVED TO LOS ANGELES, JACOBSEN SAYS, THEY WERE "EATEN UP," AND THAT WAS THE END. JACOBSEN STAYED IN LA AND WORKED IN THE TUCSON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, AND TREICHEL STILL MAKES EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC IN MINNESOTA. SADLY, BERGER & CORNEL HAVE PASSED. *THANKS TO JIM J., HOMERO, PHILIP M., & TASHA @ KEARNEY

TUNE INTO THE RADIO VERSION OF "THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC" ON "OUTSIDE THE LOOP" ON WGN RADIO 720 AM, SATURDAY AT 6 AM WITH HOST MIKE STEPHEN. COMMENTS, IDEAS TO pl3sticcw@hotmail.com ARCHIVED @ OUTSIDETHELOOPRADIO.COM

its" (for marimba and percussion) and "Construction House" (for drum kit), both from June's *New Works for Solo Percussion*, reveal how Daisy has developed his long-standing facility with sonic contrasts into a system for generating and sustaining dramatic tension for 15 minutes at a time. Engineer and electronic musician Alex Ingilizian will join Daisy to execute *Staklo*, a composition, reminiscent of gamelan music, for intricately layered glass percussion. In the second set, Daisy will improvise with guitarist Andrew Clinkman. —BILL MEYER

SATURDAY

TOMBSTONE EYES *Bloodiest headlines; Tombstone Eyes, Sweet Cobra, and Tight Phantomz open. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+*

This Chicago four-piece landed hard and heavy in 2018, announcing they were here to stay with a two-song demo of heavy effects-laden, bluesy psyche-

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MUSIC



Dreamcatcher © OGASABARA MASAKI

delic rock with a space-truckin' "brotherhood of the road in a galaxy far, far away" atmosphere. Veterans of Longhairs, Dragon Feeder, the Brokedowns, and Salvation, the guys in Tombstone Eyes have honed a swaggering, confident groove with a generous helping of scuzz. They've just completed their strong debut full-length, *Land in the Sky* (Akashic), recorded with local producers Mike Lust and Carl Saff. The tracks from last year's demo (the hulking, ominous "Hungry Ghosts" and the 15-minute banger "Solar Barge") get reprised here, while new monster tracks ("Procession of the Sun," "Black Knight Satellite") cover even more ground: slow-banging doom, Blue Öyster Cult-like sci-fi boogie, and melancholy cold-blackened-void trip-outs, all while the rhythm section anchors the spaciness down deep in the earth. This show serves as a release party for *Land in the Sky*, and a limited number of vinyl copies will be available for advance purchase (it'll be rolled out on Bandcamp soon after the show and on Spotify and iTunes in early 2020). The show's killer bill is rounded out by local heavyweights Bloodiest (who headline), Sweet Cobra, and Tight Phantomz. —MONICA KENDRICK

SUNDAY8

BATTLES See *Pick of the Week*, page 28. *Guerilla Toss* opens. 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, sold out. 18+

DREAMCATCHER 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 2047 N. Milwaukee, \$79-\$129. 18+

Dreamcatcher evolved out of a chipper five-member Korean girl group called Minx that launched in 2014 and soldiered through a couple of unsuccessful years. In 2017 they started again,

armed with a new name, two more members, and a gothic makeover. Their debut single as Dreamcatcher, "Chase Me"—indebted to 2000s alt-metal groups such as Evanescence—introduced their new sound, a seamless melding of pop music with rock pastiche. Their follow-up, "Good Night," includes a rap verse, multiple guitar riffs, and a relatively upbeat chorus that all blend together beautifully. On the recent Japanese-language track "Breaking Out," Dreamcatcher take things even further by juxtaposing a tropical house beat with grandiose symphonic rock. K-pop groups often mix genres, but Dreamcatcher manage to stand out in a crowded industry, since few of their peers incorporate elements of alt-metal or hard rock. They consistently feature a marriage of rock and pop on their lead singles, but they make unexpected leaps too: "Wonderland" indulges in sultry R&B, "July 7th" is a buoyant reggae song, and "Which a Star" is frothy synth-pop that recalls Glasgow trio Chvrches. Dreamcatcher confidently adapt to any style they tackle, and their success since their overhaul suggests they can take on anything. —JOSHUA MINSOO KIM

LOS LOBOS See also *Monday and Tuesday*. 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, sold out. 18+

Los Lobos have spent their nearly half-century career staying one step ahead of anyone's expectations. Formed in 1973, the group spent their early days playing Top 40 hits and ranchera on the East LA party circuit, but by the end of the decade they'd retooled their sound for the local punk scene. In 1987, they recorded some Ritchie Valens covers for the soundtrack of *La Bamba*, the 1987 biopic of the Chicano rock pioneer—and hit number one on *Billboard* with their spin on the title track. They followed that up with 1988's *La Pistola y el Corazon*, an album of traditional Mexican music—a move that may have shocked fans who'd been introduced ➔

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GOOSE ISLAND

MUSIC

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to them by the movie and expected an oldies party band a la Otis Day & the Knights. But anyone who'd followed Los Lobos since their pre-*La Bamba* years might have sensed a change was coming—not least because they made a cameo in the film as a traditional Mexican band. In the three decades since, Los Lobos have morphed from Tex-Mex to rockabilly to vintage R&B to Grateful Dead-inspired “jams” to unclassifiable experiments (which their spin-off band, the Latin Playboys, also explored to great effect). But aside from a track for a 1988 Warner Brothers holiday sampler, they hadn't recorded any Christmas music until the brand-new *Llego Navidad*. They've returned to their traditional roots on the bulk of the songs, but the one R&B ballad, “Christmas & You” (sung by cofounder David Hidalgo), would be worthy of a remake by Jesse Belvin or Sam Cooke. After 46 years together, Los Lobos remain unparalleled in their scope. —**JAMES PORTER**

JAMES BLOOD ULMER 8 PM, the Promontory, 5371 S. Lake Park Ave. West, \$25-\$45.

Guitar gods don't come much more sagelike, subversive, and utterly distinctive than James Blood Ulmer. Born Willie James Ulmer in North Carolina, this towering figure of free blues guitar, now 79 years old, started off in 1960s soul-jazz combos in Pittsburgh and Columbus, Ohio, before settling in New York in 1971. In the Big Apple he hooked up with progressive jazzers such as Art Blakey, Rashied Ali, and Larry Young, but his best-known association



Andrew Bird BEN BOWEN FOR CHICAGO READER

is with one of the godfathers of avant-garde jazz, Ornette Coleman. Ulmer was the first electric guitarist to record and tour with Coleman's ensemble, and he adopted the bandleader's singular approach, dubbed “harmolodics.” That discipline is notoriously difficult to understand, let alone explain, but Joe Yanosik did a pretty good job in online magazine

Doobeedoobeedoo NY when he described it as “not bound by a specific tonal center in which harmony, tempo and melody all have equal importance. Each player in the ensemble can play what they feel as long as they listen carefully to what the other musicians are playing.” Ulmer never delves into pure improvisation in his fearless fretwork; wheth-

er he's performing his own songs (such as insurrectionist anthem “Are You Glad to Be in America?”) or covers (such as Hendrix's “Voodoo Chile”), he twists each song inside out to expose its seemingly elastic musical guts and skeleton. Ulmer is essentially the last guitarist to have expanded the vocabulary of the guitar, and it's apparent in his wah-wah licks, his sizzling distortion, and the occasional utter free-ness in his playing. Influenced by Hendrix and Coleman as well as by the wild 'n' woolly free jazz of John Coltrane and Albert Ayler, Ulmer's crucial solo LPs, including *Tales of Captain Black* (1978) and *Black Rock* (1982), affirm his love and respect for the blues while adding his own freaky take on the genre. To indulge his funkier, more out-jazz side, Ulmer launched the Music Revelation Ensemble in the 1980s, whose various lineups included such titans as Pharoah Sanders, David Murray, and Sam Rivers. Solo Ulmer performances are as rare as hen's teeth, and recent set lists show that along with exploring free jazz, he's been covering blues standards such as “Rock Me Baby” and Jimmy Reed's “Going to New York.” But whatever he plays, you can always expect the unexpected from this idiosyncratic living legend. —**STEVE KRAKOW**

MONDAY9

ANDREW BIRD See also *Tuesday* and *Wednesday*; runs through *Fri 12/13*. *Madison Cunningham* opens. 8 PM, *Fourth Presbyterian Church*, 126 E. Chestnut, sold out.

Winter can be a stressful time, especially around the holidays, but Andrew Bird's annual string of hometown shows at Fourth Presbyterian Church, which he's christened “Gezelligheid” after the

2019 December FitzGerald's

6615 W. ROOSEVELT RD. BERWYN, IL 60402 (708) 788-2118

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
CHICAGO 1 GRANDSTAND BIG BAND plus Lakes County HS Jazz Band	COMING SOON Tue, Jan. 7 WDCB Bluesday Tues with the Kinsey Report	3 WDCB PRESENTS BLUESDAY TUESDAY w/ HOST TOM HARKER 8-11 PM - 2 SETS Altered5 OPEN MIC IN THE SIDEBAR	BIG BAND 4 DANCE NIGHT WITH APOL BIG BAND SideBar Sessions with PLANET FLUPPO TRIO	EXPOSURE 5 LOCAL MUSIC SHOWCASE KING CORMACK - JAN LEITH SCOTT FORTMAN & THE ARCHITECTS SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	Club Closed For A Private Party SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	CHIPS & HEATHER'S COUNTRY CALENDAR SHOW Details on back!
Jazz 8 Community Big Band Holiday Show	Fri, Jan. 10 Joel Paterson & The Modern Sounds	10 OAK PARK VOICEBOX STORYTELLING NIGHT FEAT. CARRY RICHARDSON OPEN MIC IN THE SIDEBAR	11 SARAH BORGES & THE BROKEN SINGLES SideBar Sessions with GREG DUZDZINSKI QUARTET	12 Now in its 10th Year! Naomi & Ron's Christmas Special SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	13 Now in its 10th Year! Naomi & Ron's Christmas Special SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	14 BRAVE COMBO HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR! SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW
Fri, Jan. 11 Webb Wilder & The Beatnecks	Sat, Jan. 24 The Waco Brothers	JON DEE 17 GRAHAM AND BONNIE WHITMORE OPEN MIC IN THE SIDEBAR	18 A Swingin' Christmas with the ROB PARTON BIG BAND SideBar Sessions with JAROD BUFE QUARTET	19 COUNTRY NIGHT IN BERWYN SALUTES THE HOLIDAYS! SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	20 REDMONDS FAMILY CHRISTMAS SHOW THE REDMONDS PETTY UNION SECOND TO ROME SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	21 THE HEAVY SOUNDS STAX HOLIDAY REVUE SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW
Fri, Jan. 31 Rico Birthday Bash	It's A Wonderful Life Viewing Party - SOLD OUT -	24 MERRY CHRISTMAS Closed	26 BLUES SOUL FUNK 27 RONNIE BAKER BROOKS SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	28 Fin Del Año Fiesta! A Night Of Latin Jazz Featuring ESSO		
BRITISH BUDDY ALUMNI BIG BAND w/ VOCALIST FRIEDA LEE	COME NEW YEAR'S EVE WITH US!! IN THE CLUB Classic Rock Dance Party - Relive Your Misspent Youth! EXPO'76	29 Party Hats! Favors Free Coat Check Champagne Toast at midnight! CLOSED JAN. 1	2 WORKING MOTHER PLUS JOSEFINA SIDEBAR SHOW - SEE BELOW	3 Record Release! 4 DONNIE VIE OF ENOEF Z'NOFF PLUS JAY GOEPNER		

SIDEBAR SHOWS * No Cover, Donation Asked / ** Cover Charge

* Thu, Dec. 5 - Bitters
* Fri, Dec. 6 - Jenny Bienemann & Friends
* Fri, Dec. 13 - Bunkertown
** Sat, Dec. 14 - Ralph Covert

** Sun, Dec. 15 - Teen Artist Open Mic
* Thu, Dec. 19 - Phil Angotti & Friends
** Fri, Dec. 20 - Christmas with the Beatles
** Sat, Dec. 21 - Lovehouse Holiday Show

** Sun, Dec. 22 - Anderson Family Holiday Jamboree
* Fri, Dec. 27 - Cannonball
* Thu, Jan. 2 - Bitters
* Fri, Jan. 3 - Jenny Bienemann & Friends

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Friday, Jan. 10
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Saturday, Jan. 11
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Friday, Jan. 21
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Friday, Jan. 24
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OPEN MIC ON TUESDAY EVENINGS (EXCEPT 2ND)

MUSIC

Dutch word for conviviality or coziness, have the potential to temporarily melt away seasonal anxieties. The multi-instrumentalist and songwriter has played in many settings throughout his illustrious career, and because I've seen him in a wide variety of them, I've concluded that these solo performances are where he's most eager to explore. He revisits the lushly atmospheric, loop-based music of his early days using violin, guitar, glockenspiel, and voice—including his trademark whistle—creating the type of intimate soundscapes that he's put on the back burner lately as he's focused on full-band arrangements. On this year's *My Finest Work Yet* (Loma Vista), Bird's topical, witty lyrics guide the musicians as they beautifully blend a mostly acoustic palette with tight vocal harmonies. But at his church residency, without a band, he kicks back a bit. In the church's familiar surroundings, he seems more relaxed; he's sometimes goofy, he pulls out deep cuts he hasn't performed in ages, and as clichéd as it sounds, he gives the audience a good homey feeling. This year's shows are particularly special, not just because Bird took last year off but also because he surprised his fans last month with a Christmas EP called *Hark!* In a promo video for the EP, he wonders why he released Christmas music while living in LA, not during one of the nearly 40 cold, harsh winters he spent in Chicago, finally concluding, "That sort of suffering is etched in my psyche." *Hark!* is full of bittersweet, jazzy covers (including two *Peanuts* Christmas favorites) and originals that acknowledge the challenges winter can bring. On the chorus of opening track "Alabaster," Bird sings, "Days are growing short / Nights are growing longer / Gotta get much stronger / To make it through." Ultimately, though, *Hark!* isn't a soundtrack for brooding in the dark—much like Bird's *Gezelligheid* shows, it's a soundtrack to warm the soul. —IZZY YELLEN

LOS LOBOS See Sunday, 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, \$65-\$78. 🎧

MOUNT EERIE Julie Doiron opens. 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 1807 S. Allport, \$18-\$35. 17+

Since 2003, Microphones front man Phil Elverum has used his project Mount Eerie to pull intense, heartbreaking moods out of stark minimalism. He's recorded in remote cabins and made entire albums with a single acoustic guitar or a vintage Casiotone keyboard, and his songs are raw, real, fractured, and straightforward. In 2016, Elverum suffered the loss of his wife, cartoonist and musician Genevieve Castrée, to cancer, and the final few months of her life and his resulting grief fed into the crushing honesty of his next two albums, 2017's *A Crow Looked at Me* and 2018's *Now Only*. Mount Eerie's brand-new *Lost Wisdom Pt. 2* is a collaborative effort with Canadian indie-rock singer-songwriter Julie Doiron, and while it's by no means uplifting, it does offer some glimmers of joy. The arrangements remain barebones, but moments of beautiful, swelling electric guitar and warm vocal interplay hint that Elverum will eventually make peace with his tragedy.

—LUCA CIMARUSTI

TUESDAY10

ANDREW BIRD See Monday; runs through Fri 12/13. Madison Cunningham opens. 8 PM, Fourth Presbyterian Church, 126 E. Chestnut, sold out. 🎧

LOS LOBOS See Sunday. 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, \$65-\$78. 🎧

WEDNESDAY11

ANDREW BIRD See Monday; runs through Fri 12/13. Madison Cunningham opens. 8 PM, Fourth Presbyterian Church, 126 E. Chestnut, sold out. 🎧



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12/14	- SLEEP ON IT	01/17	- MINIATURE TIGERS
12/15	- MORTIFIED	01/18	- THE JUNGLE GIANTS
12/17	- LEWBERGER	01/19	- SUSTO
12/19	- SHE WANTS REVENGE	01/23	- RATBOYS
12/27-28	- CHERRY GLAZER + CHARLY BLISS	02/05	- GASHI
12/30-31	- BADBADNOTGOOD	02/20	- VÉRITÉ
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8Matikogan, Joel Q, D2X, Jonathan Stewart, 3name 12/19, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+
All Time Low 12/20-12/21, 8 PM, House of Blues

Armnhr 2/28/20, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Bad Omens, Oh Sleeper, Thousand Below, Bloodline 3/14/20, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Nat Baldwin, Matt Mehlan 3/31/20, 9:30 PM, Hideout
Big 95.5 Country Christmas featuring Dylan Scott, Carly Pearce, Hardy 12/12, 8:30 PM, Joe's Live, Rosemont

Blanks 3/16/20, 7:30 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM

Brand X, District 97 3/27/20, 7:30 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Nicole Bus, Tone Stith 2/22/20, 9 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Cam'ron 2/25/20, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 12/6, noon, 17+

Carnifex, 3teeth, Browning, Skold 3/26/20, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Derrick Carter 1/31/20, 10 PM, Smart Bar

Chicago, Rick Springfield 8/1/20, 6:30 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM

Christmas with the Beatles featuring Sgt. Sauerkraut's Polka Band, Danny Donuts, Beatlejam, and more 12/20, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
City Morgue 3/23/20, 6 PM, Reggie's Rock Club

Daryl Cura, J. Copes, Roger That 12/19, 10 PM, Smart Bar

Damien Escobar 12/12, 8 PM, City Winery

Five Finger Death Punch, Papa

Roach, I Prevail, Ice Nine Kills 5/19/20, 6 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM

Flora Cash 4/9/20, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM

Robyn Hitchcock 4/23/20, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/6, 9 AM

Holdup, Grieves 3/21/20, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Holiday of Horror featuring Hewhocorrupts, Something is Waiting, Extraction Point 12/21, 6:30 PM, Reggie's Music Joint

Holiday of Horror featuring Macabre, Novembers Doom, Without Waves, Everything Must Die 12/21, 6:30 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Holy Fuck 4/7/20, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM, 18+

Homesafe, Kayak Jones, Lurk, Pat Egan & the Heavy Hearts 12/21, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Miki Howard, Cherelle, Laroyce Hawkins 1/8/20, 8 PM, City Winery

Sierra Hull, Jodee Lewis 2/27/20, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/6, 9 AM

Ile 2/8/20, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/6, 9 AM

Iyla 3/7/20, 8:30 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

I_o 3/27/20, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Jayhawks 4/18/20, 8 PM; 4/19/20, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/6, 9 AM

Lil Tjay 2/21/20, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 12/6, noon

Madina Lake, Action Blast 12/27, 7:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Bruno Major 3/19/20, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM, 18+

Dan Mangan 4/2/20, 8 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM, 18+

Chrisette Michele 2/7/20, 8 PM, Patio Theater

Minimal Beat presents Ryan Hadarah, Joe Wortell & the Natural Law, Inbetween Days 1/13/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Mdou Mctar, Gunn-Truscinski Duo 4/1/20, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM

Alanis Morissette, Garbage, Liz Phair 7/17/20, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, on sale Fri 12/13, 10 AM

Mustard Plug Holiday Show with Lippies, Eradicator, Malafacha, DJ Chuck Wren 12/28, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Eric Nam, Frenship 2/28/20, 7:30 PM, the Vic

Nightmares on Wax 4/18/20, 9 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM, 18+

Nocturna featuring DJ Scary Lady Sarah 12/21, 11:30 PM, Metro, 18+

Palehound, Adult Mom 3/21/20, 9 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM, 18+

Passafire 4/10/20, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Joel Paterson & the Modern Sounds 1/10/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 12/6, 11 AM

Pink Frost, Pink Avalanche, Underhand 1/23/20, 8:30 PM, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/6, 9 AM

Pussy Riot 3/26/20, 7 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM

Rami & the Reliables, Jungle Green 1/12/20, 8:30 PM,

Hideout
Rico Birthday Bash 1/31/20, 9 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Riverboat Gamblers, Red City Radio, Kali Masi 12/15, 11:30 AM, Cobra Lounge
Siames 1/31/20, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Soul Asylum, Local H 2/14/20, 7:30 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 12/6, 10 AM, 18+

Sudan Archives 3/4/20, 9 PM, Sleeping Village

Sweet Remains 1/19/20, 7 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 12/6, 9 AM

Switchback 4/4/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Tall Heights, Saint Sister 2/14/20, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Through Fire, Brkn Love, Saul, Dead Posey, Face the Fire 12/12, 6:30 PM, the Forge, Joliet

Transviolet, Armors 3/11/20, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Wailin' Jennys 2/1/20, 7 PM, Patio Theater

M. Ward 5/1/20, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Weighted, Stillwell, Antighost, Pelafina, Sugarpill 1/11/20, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge

Winter Solstice Sunrise Concert Series featuring Hamid Drake & Michael Zerang 12/21-12/23, 6 AM, Links Hall at Constellation

Working Mother, Josefina 1/3/20, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Xylouris White 12/14, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

Zoofunkyou, Goose Corp., DJ Gac 12/21, 8 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

UPDATED

Ali Barter 3/15/20, 7:30 PM, Beat Kitchen, rescheduled and relocated; tickets for 11/13 Schubas show will be honored

Xavier Omär, Elhae 12/16, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, relocated; tickets purchased for the Metro will be honored

Kevin Ross 4/22/20, 8 PM, City Winery, rescheduled; contact point of purchase for refund information

UPCOMING

Adicts 1/29/20, 8 PM, House of Blues, 17+

Atmosphere, Lioness, 1/14/20, 8 PM, Metro, 18+

Avery Sunshine 12/30, 8 PM; 12/31, 7:30 and 11 PM; 1/1/20, 5 PM, City Winery

Bailen 1/24-1/25/20, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

Marcia Ball, Sonny Landreth 2/16/20, 7 PM, FitzGerald's,

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Berwyn
Band Royale, Tomblands, Planetsexploder 1/22/20, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

William Basinski performs On Time Out of Time 1/3/20, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Basta 12/14, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Cloakroom, Pinebender, Sore-spot 12/22, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Clozee 12/29, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Roy Kinsey, Eli Major, Semira-truth, DJ Cash Era 12/17, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

Hayley Kiyoko 2/28/20, 8 PM, Aragon Ballroom

Julian Lage & Chris Eldridge 4/4/20, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio, Neal Francis 12/31, 9 PM, Park West, 18+

Catherine Lamb & Rebecca Lane 12/14, 8 PM, Graham Foundation F

Jon Langford & Sally Timms 1/19/20, 3 PM, Hideout

Bettye LaVette 12/20, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

Lúnasa 3/21/20, 5 and 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

The Music of Cream with Kofi Baker, Malcolm Bruce, & Will Johns 4/26/20, 7:30 PM, Park West, 18+

MusiQ Soulchild 12/19-12/20, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery

Nadie Es Ilegal: A Bail Bond Party to Benefit RAICES with DJ Grief Richards 12/18, 7 PM, Constellation, 18+

Meshell Ndegeocello 3/18/20, 7 and 9:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Seventeen 1/12/20, 7:30 PM, United Center

Stander, Dungeon Mother, Jordan Reyes, Pepper Mill Rondo 12/15, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Tove Lo, Alma 2/19/20, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre

Travelin' McCourys 3/5/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Webb Wilder & the Beatnecks 1/11/20, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Mars Williams presents An Ayler Xmas featuring Witch-es & Devils, and more 12/14, 7:30 PM; 12/15, 9 PM, Hungry Brain



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

ALMOST THREE YEARS ago, this wolf went gaga for the hushed, elegiac drones on *Weird Times*, the solo debut from **Implodes** guitarist **Matt Jencik**, who's also recently toured in Slint and Circuit des Yeux. On Friday, December 13, French/UK label **Hands in the Dark** drops Jencik's follow-up, *Dream Character*, and it's similarly excellent—an evocative, nocturnal journey that's simultaneously connected to daily life and to the obscure illogic of dreams. "I had a few experiences with lucid dreaming in the morning that would spill into my waking hours," Jencik says of the album's gestation. "I was coincidentally reading about the influence of dreams on surrealism and the concept of 'dream characters,' which can be the dream representation of different people, fears, and anxieties blended into a single person."

If you've shopped at **Experimental Sound Studio's** Experimental Garage Sale, then you know that the local arts organization recruits plenty of delightful oddballs to hawk their wares—who attract more delightful oddballs to buy them! On Sunday, December 8, ESS travels to Albany Park brewpub **Twisted Hippo** for an **Experimental Holiday Market**, with goods from instrument makers, labels, and other music-minded folk, including **Mississippi Records**, **Synth City**, **Smashed Plastic**, and postpunk imprint **Chicago Research**. Admission is \$5 (or pay what you can), and every dollar gets you a raffle ticket.

Chicago rappers **Ruby Watson** and **Joshua Virtue** teamed up as **Free Snacks** in summer 2018, and they've been releasing some of the city's most vital hip-hop through their **Why? Records** label. Free Snacks have leveled up in that short time, and on their second album in 12 months, last month's *Fast Food*, Watson and Virtue trade witty, animated verses so cleanly they sound like they've been doing it for decades. On Saturday, December 7, they headline a release party at a DIY space; e-mail freesnacksmusic@gmail.com for details. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

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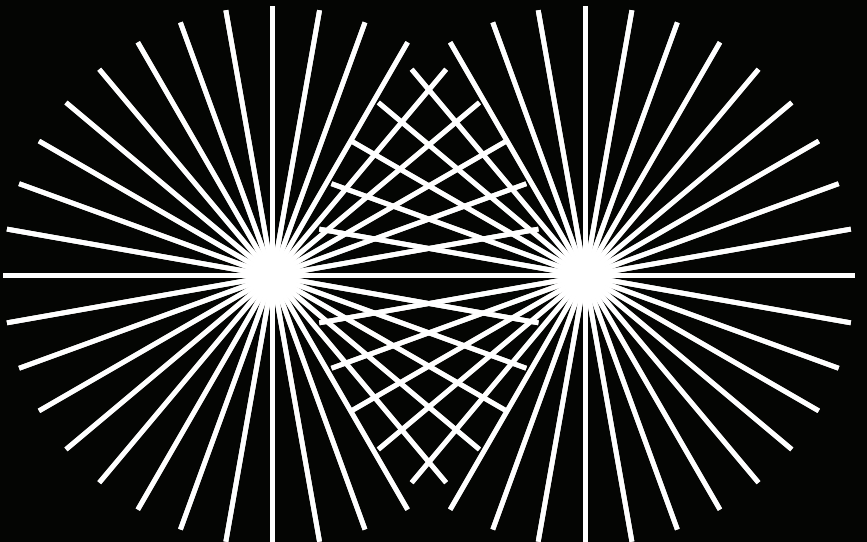
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FRIDAY DEC 06 / 7:30PM / ALL AGES Riot Fest welcomes TURNOVER & MEN I TRUST RENATA ZEIGUER	SATURDAY DEC 21 / 11:30PM / 18+ American Gothic Productions presents NOCTURNA DANCE UNTIL DAWN
WEDNESDAY DEC 11 / 8PM / 18+ LADYTRON NEW CANYONS / HIROKO YAMAMURA	MONDAY DEC 30 / 8PM / 18+ TUESDAY DEC 31 (NYE!) / 10PM / 21+ 93XRT welcomes MT. JOY MON: THE GREETING COMMITTEE POOL HOLOGRAPH TUE: WILDERADO / MICHIGANDER
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OPINION

SAVAGE LOVE

Don't be the Florence Nightingale of oral sex

How to avoid coming off as a delusional creep to strangers on the bus

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: My ex-girlfriend, who I dated for nine months, called me two months after we broke up and accused me of giving her HPV. She was going on, telling me how I needed to tell any future person I had sex with that I have HPV. I'm a 38-year-old man, and I've never had any signs or symptoms of any sexually transmitted infections. I know HPV is very common, often clears up on its own, and cannot be tested for in men. What are your thoughts? —**HELP PERSON VACILLATING**

A: Most people are infected with HPV—the human papillomavirus—at some point in their lifetime, most never develop symptoms, and in most cases the infection goes away on its own. There's an effective and safe vaccine that protects people from HPV strains that can cause cervical, anal, dick, or throat cancer—and everyone, regardless of age, should get vaccinated. And since people can develop symptoms years after their initial exposure, there's no way for your ex-girlfriend to know that you infected her. Or that she didn't infect you. Every sexually active adult should assume they've been exposed to HPV, that they have it or have had it, and conduct themselves accordingly.

Q: I'm a gay man, and there's a guy I see on the bus who I find attractive in the extreme. I can't keep myself from looking at him. Now here comes the but: He smokes. I've been toying with an idea to convince him to quit. I want to slip a note into his pocket or backpack with the following proposal: "Let's make a deal. You give up cigarettes, and in return I'll give you a blowjob once a week for a year. I'm concerned about your health. Please consider." Other people who ride the bus also smoke, but I'm not inclined to make them the same offer. But it makes me sad knowing this guy smokes, and I want to get him to stop. —**BEFORE UNDERTAKING SINCERE TOBACCO ERADICATION DEAL**

A: While your motives are no doubt pure, you don't know if this guy is attracted to you. But he's likely to react badly to your proposal even if he is. Because while you and I both know you're being entirely selfless—you're the Florence Nightingale of anonymous/no-recip

blowjobs—this extremely attractive stranger is going to assume you're a delusional creep with boundary issues, because slipping a note like that into someone's backpack or pocket (which would require you to technically and legally assault him) is precisely the kind of thing delusional creeps with boundary issues do. And because delusional creeps with boundary issues do this sort of thing, BUSTED, good and decent guys like you can't do it without being misunderstood. So absent some sign of interest from this attractive stranger, you're going to do what any normal, non-delusional, non-creepy gay guy would do after seeing an attractive stranger on the bus: leave him alone while surreptitiously checking to see if he's on any of the gay hookup apps.

Q: My wife is über-vanilla. She is willing to spank me and peg me, but she won't "take charge" of the situation. She's doing it to please me and expects me to signal approval throughout the process. As soon as a spanking gets to the point that I'm flinching and wanting it to stop, she stops. We've never gotten more than a few strokes into the pegging for the same reason. I don't really crave pain per se, but I want and need her to be in charge. —**SEEKING POINTERS ABOUT NEEDED KINKS**

A: One of the top reasons people choose safe words, SPANK, is so that they can scream, "Oh, God! Stop, please! I beg you! It's too much!" and the person who's spanking or pegging them knows that since they didn't hear "collusion" or "giuliani" or "zelensky," the spanking or pegging can continue. Not using the safe word is how a sub signals their approval throughout the spanking/pegging/whatevering process—or, at the very least, how a sub signals their willingness to endure the spanking/pegging/whatevering to please the top.

Q: My long-term partner and I are in a soft Dom/sub relationship. Neither of us has been sexually or physically abused. I suffer mainly from depression and a little anxiety. Lately if I have an intense orgasm and then he goes to town with penetration, there will be a point where I physically shove him off and then my

OPINION

body shakes and my breathing starts getting really fast and I start crying, and basically I'm having a panic attack. I feel terrible for my partner, because it's not really his fault. But somehow the physical overstimulation gives my body the "okay" to have a panic attack. It's happened a few times, and my partner is now hesitant to have sex. I want to be able to stop these panic attacks mainly for him. However, when I do have the panic attacks, I want to just cry and let everything out. But of course my amazing partner just wants to comfort me and get it to stop. —**PROBLEMS AROUND NOOKIE-INDUCED CRISIS**

A: Panic attacks during sex are something you might want to explore with a therapist or counselor, PANIC. If you're already seeing someone about your depression and anxiety, please bring these attacks up with your provider. If you aren't seeing someone, please start seeing someone. As for your partner's hesitation to have intercourse, well, that's understandable. But there's an easy enough work-around: If an intense orgasm followed by go-to-town-style penetration triggers your panic attacks, then either don't do penetrative sex after you've had an intense orgasm or wait until after your partner goes to town to have your orgasm.

Q: I've been in situations where I'm with my better half, rocking her world, giving her an orgasm, coming inside her, and she loves it. The next week, same scenario, she's moaning and groaning, I explode, and she says to me, "Did you come?" And I'm there thinking, "I thought I was pleasuring her like last time, and she suddenly can't tell when I exploded inside her?!" —**WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK**

A: Sometimes the person getting fucked (PGF) is paying close attention to the person doing the fucking (PDTF). The PGF is really taking the PDTF in, the PGF can see how close the PDTF is getting, the PGF knows just when the PDTF has arrived. But sometimes the PGF's eyes roll back in their head and they float the fuck away, WTAF, because the fucking feels that damn good. The PGF moans, the PGF groans, but the PGF is so lost in the physical and emotional sensations—they're getting so deeply into the fucking—that it's not until after the PDTF stops fucking them that the PGF even realizes the PDTF is done fucking them. So it's not a bad sign that your better half sometimes has to ask if you came, WTAF, it's a good sign. **A**

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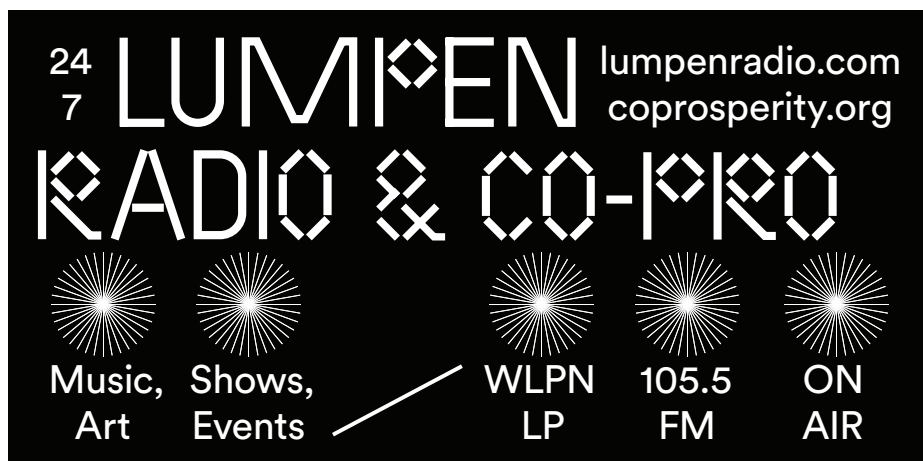
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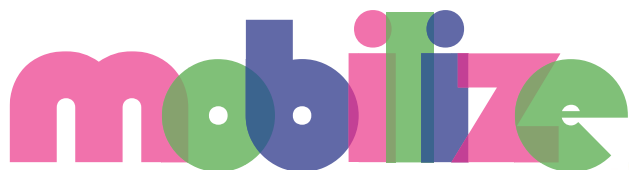
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Moms Demand Action - Chicago NW - December Social Gathering

**December 5
6:30pm - 9:30pm**
Old Irving Brewing Co.
4419 W. Montrose Ave.

Ride the CTA with IOPA & Friends to the Chicago Youth Climate Strike

**December 6
10am - 2pm**
10:11 am train departure
CTA Green Line Oak Park Avenue Station

Chicago Youth Climate Strike

**December 6
11am - 1pm**
Crown Fountain,
Millennium Park
201 E. Randolph St.
(between Michigan Ave. and Columbus Ave.)

Englewood Leadership Symposium Powered by R.A.G.E.

**December 7
9am - 4pm**
Kennedy King College
740 W. 63rd

MLK Lighting Event at Tuley Park

December 7

12pm - 3pm

Tuley Park
501 E. 90th Pl

Democratic Socialists of America-General Membership Meeting

**December 7
12:30pm - 4pm**
Chicago Teachers Union
1901 W. Carroll Ave.

Civics 101: Ask Everything

**December 8
12pm - 1:30pm**
Andre Vasquez,
Political Page
2406 W. Bryn Mwar Ave.

Constellations not Cops: Astrology & Trivia to benefit Black Lives Matter

**December 9
7pm - 10pm**
Beauty Bar Chicago
1444 W. Chicago Ave.

Re-Envisioning Community Safety: A Public Conversation

**December 11
6:30-9pm**
Oak Park Library
834 Lake St.
Oak Park, Illinois 60301

Give a Gift Fundraiser and Concert

December 11

6pm - 12am

Emporium Wicker Park
1366 N. Milwaukee Ave

Postcard Party

**December 14
10:30am-12:30pm**
Oak Park Public Library
834 Lake St.

Join Us To Knock Doors and Make Wisconsin Blue Again

**December 14
10am-5pm**
Backlot Coffee
3982 N. Avondale Ave.

A Just Chi General Meeting

**December 18
5:30pm-8pm**
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Chicago
4753 N. Broadway St.
Ste. 502

December Lakeview Rent Control Action

**December 20
4pm-6pm**
Whole Foods Market
3201 N. Ashland Ave.

Women's March Chicago- Save the Date

**January 18
11am - 1pm**
Grant Park

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STATE OF ILLINOIS, PUBLICATION NOTICE OF COURT DATE FOR REQUEST FOR NAME CHANGE. Location Cook County - County Division - Case Type: Name Change from Maria Lin Zhang Kung to Maria Lin Zhang Court Date December 30, 2019, 9:30 AM in Courtroom #1706 Case # 2019CONC001372 (12/12)

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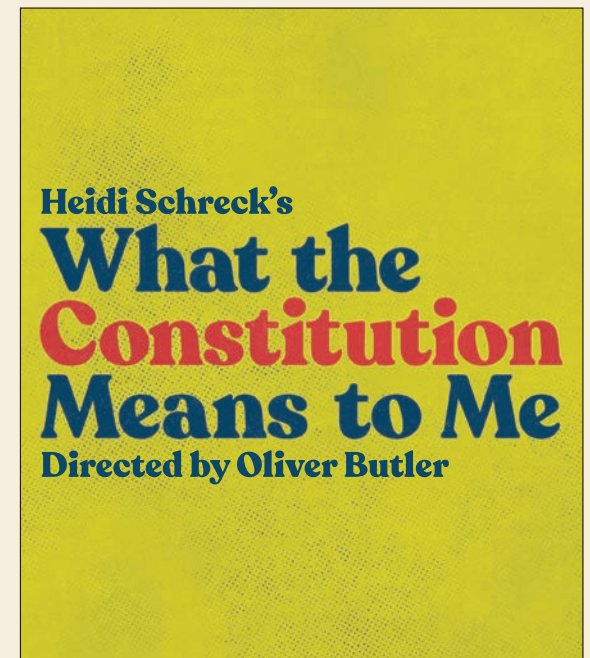
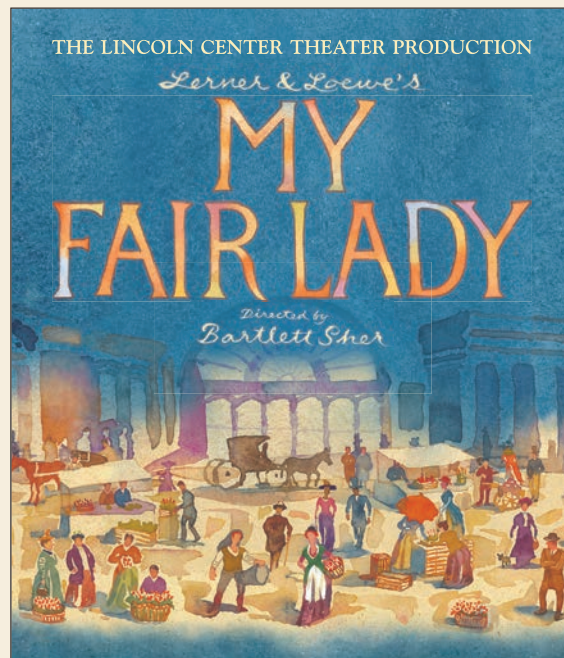
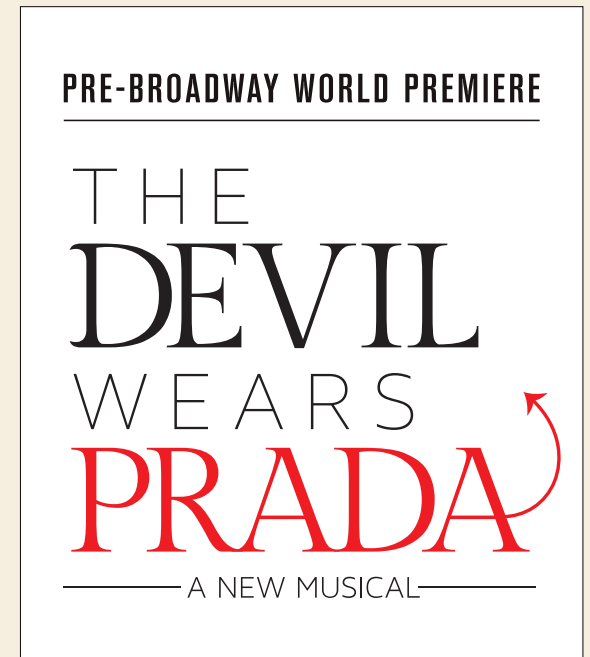
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